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PRIEST AND MAN.

J. ADELARD RENÉ.

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PRIEST AND MAN

PRIEST AND MAN

A Story of Love and Duty

BY

J. ADELARD RENÉ

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
MY FRIEND
Doctor John C. Adams
IN APPRECIATION
OF HIS CHEERFUL PHILOSOPHY

1014892

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PRIEST AND MAN

CHAPTER I

PRIEST AND MAN

SOME years ago, in the lower part of the Province of Quebec, along the shores of the St. Lawrence River, you would not have found a prettier place than Aimé Dorion's farm. The house, painted white with green trimmings, stood in a grove of pine and maple trees whose branches reached majestically over the little home as if offering it protection. Caressed by the waves of the St. Lawrence River, its sandy banks were inviting to both men and beasts.

Here for fifty years Aimé Dorion lived; but his soul was never impressed by the beauty of his surroundings. If

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at sunset he smiled, looking over the waving sea of golden grain, it was not because he saw its sublime beauty, but because of the promise of a generous crop. A beautiful day appealed to him because it meant a good day's work; but never would he pause in the early spring mornings to listen to the blended melodies of singing birds. To him there was nothing in life but work, and the poetical significance of nature had never illuminated his honest but coarse soul. His wife was his counterpart, and the charms of romance had never crossed the threshold of her heart.

Brought up in the same village, they received their education at the same school and partook of their first communion in the same church, side by side. Before they were twenty it seemed fitting that they should be united. Accordingly, they went to church to have the priest pronounce them man and wife, and came out satisfied that their life was to be prosperous because their union was blessed by the priest.

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Passionless, they attended the wedding festivities; but the strong fire of love was not burning in their hearts, and they felt none of the intoxication that fills the soul with golden dreams for the future.

True, they were happy, but with that prosaic happiness which is nothing but a degree of satisfaction such as a healthy person feels when accomplishing a pleasant duty. As they held each other's hands they felt none of love's tremor which quickens the heart beats. When their lips met it was only for an instant, instead of lingering in the sweet sensations of unsatisfied love. To Aimé Dorion and his wife their marriage was nothing more than a step in the routine of life. The flowers that grew around them carried no message to their unpoetical natures, and the sunrise that made the dewdrops glitter like millions of diamonds meant no more to them than the beginning of a new day.

In religious matters they blindly believed that there was no good religion but the Roman Catholic, and in mat-

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ters trivial or important the priest's verdict was final and supreme. They believed that he possessed supernatural powers, and that he held the keys to heaven and to hell.

The village priest, a good and kind-hearted old man, was a frequent visitor at the young couple's home, where he was always received with honor and reverence.

Father Victor Morin was of the old type of priests, who taught a hell full of brimstone for those who died with an unforgiven sin upon their conscience and while of a most kind nature, always ready to succor the dying and to aid the poor, he was most rigid in matters of religion. He believed firmly all he preached, and recognized no law but that of the Roman Catholic Church.

About a year after Aimé Dorion's marriage the cries of a girl-baby were heard in the house, and a few days later the little thing was baptized in the church where he himself had received the sacred rites; but like a flower that fades away before exhaling its per-

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fume, so passed this first-born; and a few days after the village church bells had announced the baptism of a new-born they rang the funeral "glas" of a departed soul.

"God's will," said the old priest in his saintly way, and Aimé Dorion's eyes shed no tears, satisfied that God's will was for the best; while the grief-stricken mother repressed the sobs that might have relieved her poor heart. It would have been a sin to have refused to be consoled by the priest's words.

After the funeral service Aimé Dorion paid the priest, and adding a few dollars to the usual fee, he asked that masses be said for the birth of a boy. Satisfied that such would be the case, he went back to pursue his usual work and in a short time there was mingled with their grief a mild joy in the belief that in heaven a little angel watched over them. Such is the power of religion.

Still for a long time after whenever the mother came across some of the little clothes that had been pre-

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pared for the departed child a feeling of sadness came over her soul and she knew that part of her life had gone out with the little one.

During many weeks the bereaved woman failed to sing in the early mornings as she used to do; but one day as Aimé was leaving for the field he heard the sound of his wife's voice floating sweetly in the pure matinal atmosphere, and the hope of a son sprung up in his soul.

"Monsieur le Curé, if it is a boy, and if God lets him live, I'll make a priest of him," said the hopeful farmer to the old father one Sunday after mass, and the old man smiled and answered, "May God hear you, Aimé." After a time the much-desired boy made his appearance in this world, and its strong voice announced a healthy pair of lungs, and Aimé Dorion was happier than ever.

A few weeks later, when he and the sponsors took the child to the church for baptism, the priest asked, "What shall his name be?"

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"Victor," was the proud answer; and as the priest sprinkled the holy water upon the child the father turned his face towards the altar and fervently promised that his son should be a priest.

Just then the child's voice was heard as if protesting, but as Aimé Dorion looked upon the little face there was no doubt in his mind that his child was destined to be a minister of God.

The priest received his fee, and they all left the moist and cold atmosphere of the church, to drive back home in the clear sunshine of the day. When they reached home the child was given to its mother, who fondly kissed it, and then, looking up to her husband, who stood by the bed, a smile of great joy came over her face. The next instant her husband was bending over her, kissing her with more feeling than he ever had felt before, for he was now prompted by religious fervor.

After this his countenance was more gentle, and on his features cheerfulness lingered, for was he not certain that his son would be a priest? That

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meant salvation for them all; for in those days it was the belief among these simple-minded folk that none among a priest's family could be damned.

His wife was again pursuing her household duties and they believed that the future held great things in store for them. At night while Aimé smoked his pipe near the big fireplace they spoke of those blessed days when the child, who was nursing at its mother's breast, would be a sainted man, wearing the black "soutane" of priesthood.

A few years later, when the boy was big enough to play around the house and pluck flowers in the garden, the old priest would often come and hold the lad upon his knee, caressing the little curly head and calling the boy his little "vicaire," to the delight of his parents. Strange as it was, the lad had none of the features of his parents. Both father and mother were dark, while the boy was fair, and in his golden curls there was as much sunshine as there was darkness in the black hair of his parents. His eyes were steel blue, while

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theirs were brown; and his nose was of the Roman type, while theirs were rather inclined to be flat. They had thin lips; the boy's were sensual, and his cheeks were as plump and fresh as the pinkest poppy when just bathed in God's dew. His first lesson in life was to learn to make upon himself the sign of the cross; and almost as soon as he could say "mamma" and "papa," he knew how to pronounce, while crossing himself, "*au nom du Père, du Fils, et du Saint-Esprit.*"

One evening when the old priest had come to visit, tears filled his eyes when the mother made the little boy kneel down and say his prayer. Bowing his little curly head upon the lap of his mother and joining together his small dimpled hands, after making the sign of the cross, he repeated the carefully taught prayer with such sweet innocence that, indeed, it would have been a hard-hearted person who could have witnessed the little homely scene without being impressed. Such was the

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first education of Victor, the child destined to be a priest.

When he was sent to the village school it was almost with reverence that the school-mistress spoke to him, because he was known to be "le protégé de Monsieur le Curé." He was an intelligent boy and could learn quickly, but he was different from the other children; their plays had no interest for him. At the age when boys think of nothing but games, he preferred solitude; he was a dreamer. All the poetry that nature had refused to his parents seemed to have been bestowed upon him; and from his early boyhood Victor Dorion was a lover of nature. The fragrance of the wild flowers filled his soul with delightful sensations. The song of the nightingale, brought to his ears by the evening breeze that caressed his flaxen curls, made him linger in the fields; and he would rather sit down and watch the sunset than intone an "alleluia" in the choir.

When the time for his first com-

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munion came, it was with an almost angelic reverence that he knelt at the altar and received the holy sacrament from the hands of the priest, who could not hide a smile of satisfaction as he glanced at the boy. The ceremony of his first communion was just the kind that appealed to Victor's emotional nature, and that day was like a dream to him.

Later, at that age when one passes into adolescence, Victor felt a great change in his nature. The possibilities of committing sins came vividly to him, and when he went to confession he felt a queer hesitation enter his soul. Desires to hold a girl's hand and kiss her lips had reached his heart, and he knew that these things were sins; but there was so much happiness in the mere imagining such joy that it broke his yet innocent heart to have to go to the confessional and tell of these dreams. It was at the time when these feelings were surging in his soul, that, coming home from school one day, he found himself walking with a girl of

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his age, the village doctor's daughter, a pretty little maiden with cheeks as pink as the petals of a glowing rose when it coquets with the rising sun. Her brows were like black lines evenly arched as though peeping into her clear eyes, and her hair was interwoven with pretty bright ribbons.

He was carrying her books, and now and then she stopped to pluck some wild flowers that she held close to his face to have him enjoy their fragrance. Without knowing how, Victor dropped the books on the ground and before the astonished maiden had time to realize it, he had kissed her on the lips.

"Shame on you—bad boy!" she exclaimed, and Victor's face flushed with a feeling of guilt. Red as a cherry, he could not raise his eyes to look at the pouting little mouth that his lips had just met.

"If you will promise not to do it again, I'll not tell on you, Victor."

They walked silently for awhile, she forgetful of the flowers on the wayside,

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and he too dazed to realize what he was doing.

That evening, at supper Victor had nothing to say. His appetite was poor, and when his mother asked him what was the matter his eyes filled with tears and he left the table to go to his bed.

Early the next morning, Victor was on his way to the village church, where he wanted to enter the confessional and confess to the old priest what he thought was a great sin.

When his turn arrived to enter the little cage-like confessional Victor felt nervous. He knew that in order to obtain absolution he would have to promise not to commit the same sin again.

The little wooden slide was pushed aside and through the grate-like opening Victor saw the face of the old priest, who said to him, "Commence, my son."

He recited his "confiteor," and then began his confession. It was the recitation of petty offenses, and the priest

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was ready to absolve him, when he asked him, "Is that all, my son?"

"No, my father, I have one more sin to confess—and it is of having kissed a girl."

With head bowed down in fervent repentance, the boy, at the uncalled remembrance of the sweetness of that kiss, waited to hear the priest's words.

"My son, you must promise never to do it again. It is an impure action, and none but the pure will reach heaven. If you feel the temptation enter our soul, go away by yourself and pray the Blessed Virgin to give you courage to resist. Now, my son, say your act of contrition and I will give you my absolution for all your sins."

When Victor came out of the confessional he walked like one relieved of a heavy load, and on his face shone the innocent happiness resulting from a performance of duty. He remained in church to attend mass and receive the sacrament.

When, later, he went home, his mother knew that her boy was relieved

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of some trouble, and also that he had been at the confessional.

That day at school Victor strictly kept at his books, but somehow the feeling that the doctor's daughter was near him caused him to feel a redness creeping over his face more than once. After school, while hurrying back home, he heard the steps of some one following him, and he knew who it was. A great struggle was taking place in his boyish soul, and when he heard his name being called, religious fanaticism had the best of his nature. Without answering or looking back, the boy started to run as fast as he could; but Marie-Louise followed him, having as much agility of limb as he possessed. On they ran, he holding onto his cap, and she to her little bonnet.

"Don't be afraid, Victor, it's me, Marie-Louise! Why don't you wait?"

Just then Victor's foot struck a stone on the road, and down he went, bumping his nose against the books he carried in his hands.

The next instant Marie-Louise was

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helping him to get up, and noticing blood flowing from his nose and mouth, she, with tears of sympathy in her eyes, wiped his face with her little white handkerchief.

"I am so sorry, Vic; I know it is my fault; but what made you run away from me?"

The boy was too dazed to answer her, but stared at the little thing, who was taking a motherly care of him; he felt a great sob rise in his throat, and blinding tears filled his eyes.

"Does it hurt you, Vic?"

"It is not that, Marie, but Monsieur le Curé told me to run away from you," and that was all he could say, unable to choke the sobs caused by the storm that raged in his over-sensitive child's heart.

"Why should Monsieur le Curé want you to run away from me? I am not a bad girl, am I, Vic?"

"No—but—I—might be tempted to kiss you again—don't you remember?—and it is a sin."

"Well, you don't have to kiss me,

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Victor. Look at me; I never think of such a thing," and the little girl stood erect, looking with all the intensity of her soul through her big dark eyes.

She picked up his books, and while he held her little handkerchief to his nose with one hand he took hold of her hand with the other, and in peace they walked towards their homes.

During a few minutes not a word passed between the two; then the girl spoke up: "Victor, I am sure Monsieur le Curé won't mind your walking with me if you don't try to kiss me any more."

"Well, I'll try not to," answered Victor, taking a shy glance at his pretty little companion.

When they arrived at the home of Marie-Louise, and Victor had to let go of her hand and take his books, he squeezed the little brown fingers so hard that she could not help crying, "Ouch!"

Once alone, Victor was surprised to feel that he was almost glad he had fallen; and remembering that the hand-

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kerchief he still held to his bleeding nose was hers, he put it to his lips and kissed it.

After this Victor knew that he was strong enough to resist the temptation of kissing her, and they walked to and from school together. Every day seemed to make the doctor's little daughter prettier. The awakening of love had brought to her pink cheeks new tints, and her big black eyes were softer. She loved Victor with that pure love that comes to a girl's soul as sweet fragrance to flowers. She was not aware that her sentiments for Victor were buds that only needed time to blossom into the red roses of that divine love which is the truest sign of a woman's noble heart.

Around her neck, tied to a little blue ribbon, she carried a small brass crucifix that he had given her; and when at night, saying her prayers, she kissed the image of crucified Christ, it was always with a thought for the giver of the little cross.

In return for this crucifix she had

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given him a small medallion with the picture of the Virgin on it, and Victor had tied it to his string of beads; and many times during the day he carried the little medallion to his lips, not in a spirit of religion, but prompted by his love for the giver.

Such was the beginning of their love. It sprang amidst the narrow fanaticism of religious teachings, and like the wild roses that grow among the stones of sterile land, strong and beautiful, so grew their first love.

True to his promise made at the confessional, Victor no more kissed Marie-Louise, except in dreams, when, in the darkness of the night, he woke up to find his lips close to his pillow, dreaming that it was his love's face. Such was the boyhood of Victor, the boy destined to become a priest.

The days of the village school were over, and Marie-Louise's father had sent her to Montreal to spend her vacation, while Victor's father was making preparations to send him to college. After a long consultation with the curé,

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it was agreed that Victor should be sent to Nicolet College, where Father Morin himself had completed his studies, and had come out wearing the habit of priesthood.

Victor was fifteen, and since Marie-Louise's absence from the village he was more of a dreamer than ever. He spent his days along the shores of the St. Lawrence, where, under some tall tree, he dreamed of the girl he loved, and enjoyed the beauties of nature. Carrying in his pocket the letters she wrote him, he read them over and over again, until every word was imprinted on his heart; and at night by the tallow candle, when his parents were in bed, he answered them in his peculiar style. The close of the vacation time was drawing near, and his hope to see her was shattered when he learned that her father had decided that she should remain in Montreal to attend school in the Ste. Marie Convent.

Oh! the bitterness of that news! He had dreamed of the time when she would come and tell him all about the

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city, and now she was not coming back. In a few more days it would be impossible for them to write to each other, because the rules of those Catholic institutions do not permit such correspondence. That evening he went to the little postoffice and got what he knew was her last letter of that vacation. Sitting by the wayside, he read it while tears coursed down his cheeks. It was a message full of suffering, love, and despair, and the last paragraph read as follows:

“To-morrow, Victor, the door of the convent will close upon me and I shall not be permitted to write or receive letters from you. It is the most cruel thing that ever made my heart bleed, and like the lark that sees its freedom taken away by the shutting of the cruel doors of a cage, to-morrow my freedom will cease. The greatest pleasure of my life, that of writing to you, my dear love, will not be permitted to me; but rest assured, Victor, they can't close the doors of my heart, and your love will

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flow in it as pure as ever. Your remembrance will fortify me for the long separation and I will nurse in my soul the dearest thing in the world to me, your love. I will pray for you, Victor; I will ask the Blessed Virgin to take care of you and keep you true and sincere to me, your first love. To me, who would not care for life if you were not in the world. At night-time I think of you and kiss the little crucifix you gave me, and I know, Victor, that the good God will protect and bless you.

“Good-bye. Remember me always, when you play, when you sing, when you eat, when you sleep, and when you pray.

“MARIE-LOUISE.”

Many times during the reading of these lines Victor had to stop, for the tears in his eyes blurred everything; but when he had read the last words he gritted his teeth and closed his fingers until the nails pierced the palms of his hands, muttering, “Oh—some day

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they will not be able to keep us apart like this!"

When he reached home the old priest was there, and with a smile upon his face he said to Victor: "Victor, your father is making great sacrifices in order to send you to college, and I am sure he'll never have cause to be sorry."

The boy stared at the priest, but failed to answer.

"What! Are you not glad to have the great advantage of getting an education in the best seminary in Canada? Think of all the boys who would be so glad to have that chance."

All this time Victor was thinking of Marie-Louise, and as tears came to his eyes the old priest thought that they were brought by the idea of leaving home.

"You must not feel bad, Victor. Your parents will be allowed to visit you once in awhile, and, besides, you'll have so much to study that you'll not have time to be lonesome."

"The poor boy was never away from

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home," said the mother, and the father added: "He'll get used to it after awhile."

"Good night," was all Victor could say. Then he went to his room, where he sat down for a long while, holding in his hand Marie-Louise's letter.

The next morning he helped his father to put his trunk on the barouche, and after kissing his mother good-by, he was on his way to Nicolet College, with his father.

Wrapped in a loose overcoat made of home-spun wool, Victor sat close to his father without saying a word. His countenance was exceedingly gentle, but on his features no cheerfulness lingered; and as he turned around to wave his hand to his mother, who stood at the little gate of the garden, his gaze wandered toward the home of the girl he loved so dearly, and the next instant the moisture in his eyes made everything look blurred.

As they traversed the country with its verdant fields and its clumps of trees, the untarnished soul of Victor failed to

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absorb the beauties of nature, for it was occupied with minute recollections of days that would come no more. He felt and knew that nothing goes back to its beginning, that no stream returns to its source, that he must run with the years, and that only in remembrance could he again take those walks to the little village school with Marie-Louise. His father, now and then, said something about his future conduct while in college, but Victor could hardly answer him, so intensely was he living his last hours of freedom.

CHAPTER II

NICOLET COLLEGE

AT last they reached Nicolet, and Aimé Dorion pointed to his son the college, whose silhouette could be seen standing out against the sky. A big, quadrangular, stone building, three stories high, with pent roof and gray blinds. Beautiful ivy clings to the old stone walls and decorates them in a singular way. It is a stately and massive building, but it is mournful. An attempt at gaiety is seen in the bright flowers in the garden, but the most numerous flowers are those of the species called "Passion Flowers," because its pistils represent the cross, the nails, and the crown of thorns, in beautiful tints of liquid blue. The tall pines seemed to be singing a woeful song when Victor and his father drove under them,

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and the heavy steps of the horse creaked on the gravel avenue. The old Father Director of the institution stepped out of the big oak door and waited until Victor alighted from the barouche. Then, advancing to the boy, the old priest looked at him inquisitively and said to the boy's father, "A new élève?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Curé," answered the father, who handed him the letter of recommendation which had been given him by his village priest.

The director read it, and then with a broad smile on his face, he shook hands with the father; and taking Victor by the hand he led them to the "parloir," where the arrangements for Victor's board and other details received attention.

After this the director invited both to visit the different parts of the institution. Victor's father was much interested in the long corridors and large studying-rooms, but the chapel most impressed him. As they were passing from one apartment to the other, stu-

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dents of years before were met, and they stopped and stared at the "nouveau."

Victor felt as much interested as a prisoner does when taken to his cell, and when the time to part from his father arrived he felt a mighty sorrow enter his soul and he broke down completely, crying as he had never in his life before. His father spoke a few consoling words and then took his departure.

"My child," spoke the director, as he led Victor to the dormitory, where he was to put on the college costume—blue coat with white stripes, and a green sash—"you must resign yourself to your parents' will, which is also God's will. You will be happy here, if you will do your duty. Now, don't cry any more; some of the other boys might see you and tease you about it. Come to the recreation room."

At the recreation hall, a long, bare room with wooden seats all around, Victor was left with about two hundred boys, all of whom, it seemed to him, were looking at him.

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Near the door he dropped down on a bench and remained there, all alone, until supper time, when the bell rang, and he was conducted to his place. Then the master, a young theologian, gave the signal for everyone to kneel down, and a short prayer was said, after which, in silence, the students marched to the refectory, where again a short prayer was said before sitting to eat. During meals silence was always observed, except for the loud reading of some religious work by one of the students, this being done in turn. Victor simply made an attempt at eating some of the coarse food placed before him, "chiard," they called it. After the twenty minutes allowed for supper, he followed the rest of the students to the recreation hall, where again he sat by himself and refused to take any notice of the advances made by some of the boys. Later, after going to the chapel for the evening prayer and the recitations of the litanies, they marched in single file to the dormitory, where they were allowed five minutes to undress

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and retire in the most rigid silence. The two candles, one at each end of the hall, were extinguished and the master retired to his little curtained corner for the night. Every noise died away and in the darkness of the night the silence seemed to breed more unhappiness in Victor's soul. As he pulled the blankets over his head a great despair seized him and he felt as if drowning, and at that moment he craved for his mother so much that he unknowingly called, "Mother! Mother!"

In answer he heard heavy steps coming in his direction, and the next instant the master was standing close to his bed. But he made no motion, and soon the sound of the same heavy steps told him that the master had returned to his couch.

For hours Victor was unable to sleep; and his nervousness was increased by the snoring of those, more fortunate, who were enjoying slumber, and likely dreaming of their homes. His mind was in a turmoil, and when he tried to induce sleep by reciting his

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"Ave Maria," he found that each time he came to the name of Maria his mind wandered from his prayer to Marie-Louise. At last he fell into a semi-dozing state, only to dream of his home-life and of the girl who had taken such a place in his young nature.

At half-past five in the morning the bell rang, and it was the signal for the boys to hurry out of bed and dress after washing their faces.

Many failed to wake at the sound of the bell and the master had to go to their beds and knock their toes with a wooden rule that he carried for that purpose. But Victor was one of the first to get up and dress, and it was with a feeling of relief that he walked out of the dormitory to the chapel to say morning prayers and attend mass.

Victor now fully made up his mind to resign himself to his fate. During the divine service he prayed for more courage and resignation, and he felt much better after mass when he went to the study room, a long and dreary hall with unpainted tables and benches, illu-

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minated by tallow candles stuck in small holes in the tables. At breakfast he ate with some appetite, and during the twenty minutes of recreation that followed he was willing to be friendly with some of the boys of his age. Later, when the professors came to the recreation hall and called out the students to their respective classes, Victor was called by the professor of "Elements," and with about sixty others went to his classroom. His professor was a young priest of the kindest disposition and Victor liked him at once. In the classroom Victor was placed next to a boy named Louis Pichette, a handsome lad with large blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and yellow curls, in fact, too pretty a face to be becoming to a boy, but Louis was apparently unconscious and indifferent to his effeminate good looks. He was of a sympathetic nature and from the first he felt himself drawn toward Victor. During the following recreation the two walked together, and it was the beginning of a friendship that endured through life. Louis

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was of an indolent turn of mind and rather slow to learn, while Victor was active and quick to grasp the meaning of things, and consequently he had much time to spare and help Louis, who took advantage of this fact. It was not long before the professor realized that Victor was an exceptionally bright boy and that he would be the star of his class, while it was evident that Louis was the opposite and would be at the foot. For these reasons it was a puzzle to the young priest that these two should be such close friends, and he was in doubt as to the advisability of permitting such friendship for fear that Louis' lazy ways might have a bad influence upon Victor.

In his intense friendship for Louis Victor seemed to have found an outlet for his surplus of love for Marie-Louise; and this new condition somewhat relieved the great strain which his hyper-emotional nature had suffered since his departure from home. He felt keenly the sorrows of Louis, and was most sensitive to his happiness.

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Being of the same size, they wore each other's clothes, and went so far as to trade prayer-beads. At play they usually managed to be on the same side, and their "camaraderie" was an established fact recognized by the other scholars, who nicknamed them "les chats." They found pleasure in the foolish squeezing of each other's hands, and enjoyed writing loving notes. In these notes, full of boyish, loving expressions, Victor often called Louis "Louise," and one of these papers one day fell into the hands of their professor. It was not signed, but he recognized Victor's writing at once and after class asked him to remain.

"Victor, who is Louise?" was the first question he asked the surprised boy, who blushed and bowed his head without answering.

"You must tell me, or I will report you to the director," added the professor, holding the little note in his hand.

"Louise is Doctor Lenoir's daughter—and she is in a convent in Montreal,"

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answered Victor, almost glad to be able to tell the truth and still not divulge the fact that the note had been written to Louis Pichette, as it would certainly have meant their separation had it been known that such an unnatural flirtation was taking place between them.

"What made you write such a note when you know that it is forbidden to write to girls?"

"I will not do it again," was Victor's evasive answer.

"Well, Victor, if you promise me not to do it again, I will not punish you nor mention it to anyone; but remember your promise," and the kind professor tore the note in many pieces, to the boy's relief. Victor wrote no more notes to Louis, but their abnormal friendship continued and showed itself in many ways, such as loving glances or the pressure of hands whenever they had an opportunity.

This play at love had a soothing effect on his sensitive nature and eased the restless craving for emotion that

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lay deep in his soul. The arbitrary rules of such an institution as Nicolet College are often wholly irrational and tragic in their consequences, and the absolute prohibition to write at his liberty to those from whom the boy is separated and whom he may love intensely, has a touch of tyranny and is often responsible for such abnormal passion as will develop between two boys, as in the case of Victor and Louis. The human heart is never satisfied, and when the sacredness of its liberty is interfered with, and an outlet for its surplus of passion is denied, something morbid or abnormal is very apt to result. The heart of a fifteen-year-old boy may be tormented by passions that never assailed the hearts of men whose hair has turned gray in the common by-ways of years. Those who make such rules do not suspect that anything is wrong with their observation of human nature and human character! They are unconscious of their own lack of feeling, and they do not realize the fact that the sensitive and delicate-

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mindful young men in their charge are endowed with the faculty of feeling the intensely manly passions that rise in their souls.

Days and months went by, and still Victor's love for Marie-Louise was as keen as when he had left home for college, but he had learned to master his emotions. To all appearances he was a happy boy, but a close student of human nature could have detected a light of sadness in his eyes when at times his mind wandered back to his village school days, and when the month of May came, and with it the special religious ceremonies in honor of the Blessed Virgin, it was something else besides religious enthusiasm that made him so happy when he was asked to sing some of the sacred odes to Mary, and the sweetness of his voice was a revelation when he sang:

" C'est le mois de Marie,
C'est le mois le plus beau."

The feeling with which he pronounced the name of "Marie" was at-

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tributed to his religious fervor, but had they been able to read his heart the priests would have been shocked to find the name of "Marie-Louise." While his voice sang to the Blessed Virgin Mary, his soul's music was for the little brown-eyed girl he loved so much.

The end of the school-year was approaching and Victor, first in his class, was anxiously waiting for the day when he should return home. Little he cared for the prizes he was to receive. One glance from Marie-Louise would be much dearer to his soul than all the prizes given to him during the final exercises.

At last the day came—a bright and beautiful June day. Nature itself seemed to rejoice with the regiment of boys who were to be given their liberty after ten months of that life, hardly better than a prisoner's.

Aimé Dorion, accompanied by the old village priest, arrived early, and the director brought Victor to them and told them that he was to receive the first

prize in his class. Aimé Dorion felt a great pride in his soul, and as he looked into the handsome boy's face, in whose veins ran the blood of his blood, he was tempted to press him tenderly to his heart. The old priest felt that he also was entitled to some of the father's pride, and, turning to the director, he said with an air of confidence:

"Monsieur le Directeur, this boy is to be my 'vicaire.' We've decided that long ago, haven't we, Victor?"

"You and father have," answered the boy, as a strange light shone in his eyes for a moment.

"Well, well, he'll make a better singer than most of us are, Monsieur le Curé," said the director, smiling kindly at the boy, and then adding, "he is the best singer we have."

In the afternoon, during the distribution of prizes, Victor's father sat in the front row, next to the old curé, who handed the boy his prize, which consisted of a large red-covered volume of some saint's life.

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It was quite late in the afternoon when the ceremony was over, but Victor insisted upon going home at once. Soon after shaking hands with his classmates and receiving the director's blessing, he had the satisfaction of feeling himself on the road to his native village where he anticipated the joy of meeting the little queen of his heart. The old priest and his father sat on the back seat of the barouche, and he held the lines, sitting alone on the front seat. While his father and the curé were discussing the blessings of a college education Victor was urging the old gray mare at such a rapid and unusual gait that his father said: "Hold on, sonny; don't kill 'la grise.'"

It was quite dark when the rumbling noise of another rig was heard ahead of them. When they caught up to it Victor drew the line so as to drive by, when his father said, "Hello, that's Doctor Lenoir." It was indeed the doctor driving home with his daughter Marie-Louise, who also rejoiced in the thought of her vacation.

"Hello, Dorion, and Monsieur le Curé," answered the doctor, who had recognized them; and as the two carriages were going side by side the old priest spoke up:

"Well, well, Doctor, let the lad here drive your old plug, and come in with us."

"All right—we'll let the youngsters drive together," answered the doctor; "it will do the boy good to drive a good horse. Whoa!"

"Whoa," said Victor, who gladly exchanged place with the doctor.

So overcome by this happy incident were the two young lovers that for a few moments they could not speak. Marie-Louise was the first to recover herself, and she said:

"Well, Monsieur Victor, are you glad to come back home?"

"Am I! But what did you call me? Monsieur Victor?"

"Victor, then," said Marie-Louise, blushing in the moonlight.

"Oh, Marie-Louise! If you could only know how happy I am to be near

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you now! I have thought of you so much!" And holding the lines with one hand, his other reached for Marie-Louise's hands, which he fondly pressed.

"Get up there, or we'll run over you," spoke up the gruff doctor, who was not used to the slow gait at which Victor was now satisfied to let the doctor's horse go.

Victor urged the horse with reluctance, saying to Marie-Louise:

"Don't you wish, ma cherie, that we could travel to the other end of the world?"

"Yes, Victor, I do." The few minutes of silence that followed were full of eloquence, and as the two lovers looked into each other's face there was an immensity of pure love in their eyes that words could never have expressed.

"Did you often think of me, Victor?"

"Every hour of the day, and at night when my eyes closed it was to dream of you, ma cherie."

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"I am so glad. Oh! how I missed you!"

The tall pines of Aimé Dorion's farm could now be seen, like proud giants that held their lofty heads high in the soft moonlight and cast their shadows far into the road. Victor said:

"Marie-Louise, to-morrow at mass Monsieur le Curé wants me to sing the 'Credo,' and if I sing it well it will be for your sake, dear; yes, everything I'll do during this vacation will be for you, for you alone, my dear."

Arrived at Victor's home, the doctor and the old priest were invited in to have a glass of wine and "beignes" (as they call doughnuts in French), and Victor was told to drive the doctor's horse right in under the pines.

"Victor! Victor! mon cher enfant, Victor!" cried the mother, holding in her arms her only son, while she kissed him again and again.

Everyone was happy; the mother, because of her maternal love for her son and her pride in his success; Aimé Dorion, because his wife and boy were

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happy; the old priest and the doctor, because the wine was good.

Marie-Louise and Victor! Well, it's useless to try to express their happiness as they sat far apart and seemingly took no notice of each other. At their age, love is shy.

After drinking wine and eating many good "beignes," the doctor and the old priest filled their pipes with Canadian tobacco and made ready to proceed on their journey, the doctor having agreed to take the curé along, as the presbytery was not far from his home; and Marie-Louise had to squeeze herself between the two. After a last glass of wine and a last "Bonsoir," they were on their way to the village.

"Mother! I am so happy to be back with you," said Marie-Louise, tenderly embracing her mother, who was too happy to speak.

"The daughter is almost as tall as her mother," spoke the curé, who had witnessed the touching meeting.

"Yes, and almost as pretty," an-

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swered the gallant doctor, laughing while lovingly looking at his wife.

Again a few glasses of wine were drunk, and when the old priest got up to walk home there was a great deal of human kindness in his soul, and quite a numbness in his aged legs.

Long after the doctor had been in bed, Marie-Louise and her mother sat by the window, where the full moonlight shone upon Marie-Louise's face, bringing out all the beauty of her perfect profile, and the mother was almost astonished at the great beauty of their child.

"You'll have two months to talk to each other, and it's time you should go to bed," called out the doctor, and a few moments later two white-robed figures were kneeling and fervently saying their prayers. The mother was asking the Blessed Virgin Mary to watch over her daughter, while the daughter was thanking the Almighty for being back home where she could see and speak to Victor.

The morrow was Sunday, and when

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Victor walked to his place in the choir of the little church his glance wandered to the in-coming procession of the faithful, and a light of satisfaction shone upon his face when Marie-Louise and her mother entered and went to their pew.

When Marie-Louise saw Victor in his black cassock and white surplice a strange thought flashed through her mind and made her turn pale. It was the thought of the possibility of Victor's becoming a priest; and as the cruel idea flashed through her soul it left a trace of sadness.

When the time for the singing of the "Credo in Deum" came, Marie-Louise was intensely interested in reading her prayer-book, but as the clear and beautiful tenor voice of Victor floated in the old church's moist atmosphere she felt a peculiar thrill go through her heart and she nearly dropped her book. At once she recognized the voice which had so often sung love-ballads to her while on the blue water of the St. Lawrence, but it

was so much stronger now and so much purer, and there was something that made her feel like crying. Never before had the surprised parishioners heard the "Credo" sung in such a manner, and during the rest of the divine service there was a nervous excitement among them never felt before.

The intense happiness of Marie-Louise was marred only by the thought that Victor might become a priest. Victor's mother was filled with that happiness that comes only to a mother's heart when her son is the cause of it. But Aimé Dorion! Who could describe his feelings as he bowed his head to thank God for having given him such a son! In his soul the hope of seeing him a priest was stronger than ever; it filled his heart with a keen happiness born of religious enthusiasm; and he gloried in the anticipation of the happy day when his son should wear the habit of priesthood and have the power of throwing open the doors of heaven to penitent souls whose sins it would be in his power to absolve.

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After mass the old curé smiled at Victor while the boy was removing his choir costume. The minister of God foresaw the day when the boy would put on the black "soutane" for good, and he felt that he was instrumental in bringing about these results. Such thoughts were a source of pious yet selfish satisfaction to his loveless heart.

Instead of driving back home with his father and mother, Victor told them that he had to go to the postoffice, and from there would walk home, for he knew that Marie-Louise was waiting for him at the little postoffice. The day was bright and the cool breeze from the St. Lawrence was exhilarating, and when Victor met Marie-Louise he was in a most happy mood; but as he looked into Marie's big brown eyes he detected a trace of sadness, and said:

"Well, ma chérie, didn't I sing the 'Credo' well enough to please you?"

"Yes, Victor, you sang it better than I ever heard anyone sing it before; but

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a strange thought entered my mind while you were singing."

"What was it, ma chérie?"

"Oh, it's foolish, Victor, and I had better not tell you."

"But you must. I want you to, Marie-Louise."

"Well, it came to my mind that they, I mean your parents and the curé, might decide that you should become a priest," and as she said these words the girl looked him straight in the eyes in a wondering way.

"Oh! I guess not, unless they decide to make a nun of you, ma chérie."

Just then Marie-Louise picked up a rose-bud, and pinning it to his coat, she said, "Not while rose-buds bloom into roses will I become a nun," and they both laughed.

The vacation was a succession of happy days for Victor, who spent part of his time helping his father on the farm, and a greater part of it with Marie-Louise, to whose home he often went on the pretense of practicing his vocal music, as the doctor's home was

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the only one in the little village where an organ could be found.

Their tender hearts grew together until they beat as one. Often as they strolled among the trees, holding each other's hands, the gay piping oriole in the pine-tops seemed to rejoice at their artless love. In the evenings, when their little boat was aimlessly drifting upon the quiet waters of the St. Lawrence, nature herself seemed to hold her breath, and the stars seemed to shine more brightly than ever. It was then that love, with the charming dreams it brings, filled their souls with hope for the future. It was during these times that Victor's poetic nature raised him above his normal state and held Marie-Louise as if in a trance, and when they sang some of those homely but melodious old French ballads the broad water-lilies lay tremulously and the waves seemed to dance in the soft, radiant starlight. Their happiness would have been perfect had it not been for the gloom cast by the prospective ending of their vacation, when they

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would be compelled to part for ten months, during which all correspondence was made impossible by the rules of the institutions to which they were going. Oh! the cruelty of it!

When the last day of their first vacation came they met at their favorite nook, a place where the waters of the St. Lawrence kissed the base of a huge rock upon which the soft green moss was inviting as a place of repose, and where the tall branches of trees reached down over it as if caressing it in a tender embrace. Here they met, heart to heart, and eye to eye; he looking down into her inmost soul, while she drank his love words like sweet wine; and when they left the place Victor had carved in the rock, near the water line, the letters M. V., so deep that it is safe to say they are still being kissed by each wave that rises against them.

After the vacation Victor went to Nicolet College, while Marie-Louise was taken to the convent in Montreal. As the years went by, each vacation brought them together at the time when

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the flowers are in bloom, and each period of companionship was a repetition of the first one, except that their love was more dignified, but not less intense or less pure.

When Marie-Louise completed her studies she came home to be the joy of her mother and the pride of her father. She was as handsome as a woman as she had been pretty as a girl, and there was not a young man in the little village who would not have been her slave; but her love for Victor was such that she never even thought of the possibility of loving anyone else.

CHAPTER III

DEFIES THE AUTHORITIES

VICTOR was in the "classe des finissants," which means the last class, or "philosophy-class," and he was considered by the college faculty as the most brilliant scholar that had ever been within the walls of the old institution. As an orator he had the reputation of a Demosthenes, and the college depended on him to win the gold medal given by the bishop of Three-Rivers for the most eloquent speaker among the "finissants" of the two colleges, Nicolet and Three-Rivers.

This oratorical contest had taken place for many years, and for the last three years the college of Three-Rivers had succeeded in winning the medal; but this year the faculty of Nicolet felt very confident that Victor would win it for his college.

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The day for the contest was approaching, and Victor was given the freedom of the college. He could go where he wished and do almost as he pleased, but win the medal he must. These oratorical contests were always considered great events. They used to take place in Nicolet and Three-Rivers colleges alternately, and this year it was to be held in Nicolet. Already the hall in which it was to take place was being decorated, and a feeling of security seemed to pervade the very atmosphere of the college. In Victor the faculty and the students felt that they had a peerless orator, and a glorious victory was the foregone conclusion.

The judges were prominent men chosen among the laity, except the bishop of Three-Rivers, who was one of them ex-officio.

Victor had devoted much of his time to the preparation of his subject, but had refused to give out what it was to be until the day before the great event, when the director sent for him and told

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him that it was usual to inform his Grace the Bishop of the subject chosen.

"Monsieur le Directeur, my subject will be, 'A plea for greater moral freedom in our colleges.'"

"What?" exclaimed the surprised director. "Do you mean to presume to deliver a discourse of criticism of the existing laws of our educational institutions, by making a plea for more moral freedom?"

The director's face grew red, while perspiration rolled down his forehead; but Victor remained perfectly cool and answered: "I assure you that I have no desire to criticise the existing laws of any particular college, but I will try to demonstrate by my arguments that there is room for improvement in some of the minor regulations. I say minor, because these regulations are considered so; but I shall make an effort to show the extent of the sad effects that may result from these rules and regulations. When you so kindly gave me the liberty of choosing my subject, I studied and prayed long before I real-

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ized that the time was ripe for such a plea as I shall make to-morrow. In years past, I know that the subjects chosen related to some scientific or philosophical ideas, but why should the rule of precedence be observed? Why not be progressive and original? I would rather lose the medal to-morrow and feel that some good had come from my discourse than win it and know that my efforts had been barren in moral results. Is it not almost sacrilegious to use God's gift of oratory for the vain purpose of simply winning a gold medal? Monsieur le Directeur, if my Creator has blessed me with the faculty of oratorical power I am not willing to prostitute it to satisfy the pride of anyone by using it to obtain a medal of metal! If my voice is heard to-morrow it will be for a double purpose, and the main one is of enough dignity to command respect!"

During Victor's remarks the director had sunk into his big easy chair, and was in a state of speechless amazement. [The possibility of such a de-

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parture had never entered his mind, and he felt confident that Victor would follow the well-established rule in the choice of subject.

"Saque a papier! Victor, you have got this college in a bad box!" he exclaimed.

"I feel confident that you will change your mind to-morrow," modestly answered Victor.

After a spell of silence the director asked: "Can't you change your subject?"

"I would not if I could," was the decided answer.

"So! Well, my boy, I will call the members of the faculty and we will decide what will be done about this matter. You may go."

Victor walked out of the director's room with a feeling of uncertainty as to being allowed to deliver his discourse on the morrow.

When the members of the faculty were informed of the facts, great was the surprise at Victor's strange action, and after a long discussion it was de-

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cided to send for him and ask him to submit to them the manuscript of his prepared oration.

"I have no notes, as I expect to deliver my discourse without any to-morrow," answered Victor, when brought before the members of the faculty.

It was evident that nothing could be done, and it was decided to await the result, as it was too late to substitute anyone else; but there was a feeling of great disappointment among the members of the faculty.

The next day the students were sitting in the large hall where the contest was to take place. The college band was playing the national air, "Vive la Canadienne," and the judges and priests from all parts of the diocese were taking their places upon the platform. Just as the music ceased the bishop entered the hall, escorted by the director to the place of honor upon the stage, where he raised his right hand to administer his episcopal blessing to the kneeling crowd, after which he spoke a few words, ending by asking

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the Lord's blessing upon the two young men who were to deliver discourses. Then the director rose to introduce with a few well chosen words the young man from Three-Rivers college, who timidly advanced to the bishop, knelt down, kissed his hand, and then bowed to the audience and began his oration, "Rising of the Catholicism." It was a masterly effort, prepared with all the care of a person familiar with the rules of rhetoric. The speaker, a slender young man with pale face and sad, dark eyes, warmed up as he proceeded, and was quite eloquent; so much so that at times he had to wait until the applause subsided. At the close of his oration a real thunder of applause echoed through the old college walls, and the Three-Rivers delegates were in great glee, while the members of the Nicolet faculty were in deep fear as they turned their eyes toward Victor, who sat apparently the coolest of all. But the brightness of his blue eyes and the red spots that glowed in his cheeks indicated that

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he was keenly alive to the condition of affairs.

When silence was re-established, the director got up, and after congratulating the preceding speaker, introduced Victor, whose name was greeted with a storm of applause from the students.

Victor walked slowly to the front of the stage, where for an instant he stood silent, while his glance circled the audience. Then his musical but strong voice was heard. From the beginning he spoke in a fearless way, and as he proceeded his voice increased in volume and his face flushed up; his eyes became intensely bright and his pupils dilated; and as his enthusiasm grew it seemed to have a magnetic effect upon the audience. His words came from the soul and they went to the soul of every one; and like the storm that carries everything in its way, so did the power of his eloquence crush, for the time being, at least, the religious fanaticism that would have taken exception to less eloquent words than his.

His courage was manifested by the

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very words he spoke, but his theory was so radical and daring that it would have been considered rash had it not been so strongly supported by the irrefutable arguments that carried conviction in themselves. The climax of his eloquence was reached when he spoke of the rule absolutely forbidding young men from writing or receiving letters from those they loved and had been obliged to part with to enter college.

"Our wills are crushed and broken, our affections are blighted and crucified, when they should be encouraged and purified. The poetry of pure love is forbidden, and, if it persists, it has to live in the dark recesses of secrecy! Was God Almighty mistaken when he placed in the human heart the spark of that love we are taught is a sin? The moral freedom that permits longings and illusions is as necessary to the health of the soul as pure air is to the body's health; still, one of the first things we are asked, under pretense of moral discipline, when we enter college, is to renounce some of the dearest

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dreams of our childhood. We are told that we must forget the sweet flowers picked up on the wayside to school, because they were plucked while holding the hand of a companion maiden with whom we first learned the beauties of nature!

"I say with all the sincerity of my heart, all the power of my nature, and all the tenderness of my soul, and I swear by the hope I have to go to heaven, that I firmly believe that many a boy would grow into a better man were he given more moral freedom while in college.

"The boy who has learned to love a sweetheart in his native village, and who is forbidden to write to her or cultivate her love while in college, will often force his impulsive mind to imagine that one of his fellow students has some of the characteristics of his sweetheart, and he will encourage the growth of an unhealthy and abnormal love that can only be compared to the sprouting of vegetables when left in a dark cellar.

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"Is it not so? You, dignified and learned men, who have seen many years pass by since your schooldays, may not vividly remember these foolish and abnormal passions; but stop and lift the misty veil of the past, and look back into the first years of your school-time, and you will see the same monstrous results, results that are the children of an infamous rule. Should I live an hundred years I could not forget the cruel feeling that entered my heart when I first realized that the rules of this college would not permit me to write the things with which my heart was overflowing shortly after I became a student of this institution. This arbitrary rule cannot but be tragic in its consequences, and besides being irrational, it is despotic.

"To those who have never felt the awakening of the sweet and pure love for a being of the opposite sex, what I am saying may sound like the words of a maniac; but to those who have been blessed by their Creator with the knowledge of love, and who have felt

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keenly the stinging and the bruising of that arbitrary rule, my words will not be meaningless. When the sensitive soul is overflowing with thoughts born to be spoken to someone, why should a boy be obliged to crush them down into his heart for the want of more moral freedom?

“In all deep affection there is a passion for possession which is never satisfied, and there is something sacred in that affection because it is born of the mysterious spirit of love; but without moral freedom these deep affections are often thwarted, and they die when they could have lived in the heart like a vein of pure gold. Something like despair has overtaken many sensitive young men because a fatal and arbitrary regulation prevented them from cultivating the innocent flowers of first love that had taken root in their hearts while basking in God’s sunshine.

“They may have cried out, not in insolence, but in agony of spirit; but their sorrows were neither under-

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stood nor lightened; and while the cruel process of crowding unnatural theories into their hearts to the exclusiveness of the sweet dreams of the morning of life was carried on, some heart cord snapped asunder when the threads were soft and tender, and in time they learned to frown at the word 'love.' Before narrow religious teachings their ideals vanished, and instead they found themselves embracing a pseudo-religion, the result of a morbid condition of the human heart.

"False to the true and true to the false, the fragrance of the blooming roses brings no dreams to their weary souls. When the autumn rain patters on the fallen leaves of their adolescence they hear nothing but the hollow voice of what they call their religious duty, because they have closed their hearts to the divine sun-rays of love. On the eve of their life, instead of the fruitage promised by the spring, their hearts hold clusters withered on the vine. After living a dreamless life,

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they find themselves listening to the whispers of death; and when the sun sets beyond the misty hills they will sink to earth like decayed and leafless elms, with nothing to soften the fall but the hollow wind of their cold religious philosophy.

“God, in his wondrous, boundless plan, planted love in the human heart, and from it blossomed hope, and from hope all the dreams and ideals of youth. The worm that crawls out of the sun-touched sand is truer to its Maker than the religious fanatic who wants to improve the work of Him who made matter pregnant with immortal life. Life is only a link in the endless chain of change; when death giveth the dust to the dust, the soul goes back to the infinite soul; but while life retains the soul in its home of clay, for God’s sake give the soul moral freedom; let the human heart throb with the spirit of nature, and do not stifle the dreams of youth.

“Before closing my humble effort I beg his Grace, the Bishop, and my

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superiors, to forgive me if my expressions have been too pronounced. My words were dictated by my sincerity, and my manhood compelled me to speak as I did."

During an instant a dead silence reigned in the crowded hall; then, the greatest outburst of applause broke out. It was like the sudden roar of a terrific storm. Boys stood on benches and cried out at the top of their voices while clapping their hands, and some of the priests found themselves affected by the great sympathetic wave caused by the brilliantly and feelingly delivered plea. The Bishop alone sat apparently unmoved. When order was restored the band played a lively air, and the judges held a short consultation, resulting in their awarding the gold medal to Victor. In a few words of presentation the Bishop took occasion to state that the medal had been awarded to Victor more on account of his eloquence than for the correctness of his ideas.

The next day. the Bishop and the

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delegates from the other college returned to Three-Rivers, and the director gave the students a half holiday to celebrate Victor's victory.

Victor was now the hero of the students, who believed him to be the greatest orator that had ever lived, while the director and the other members of the faculty could hardly conceal their admiration for the daring young speaker.

"He will either accomplish much good or do much harm with his talent," said one of the old priests.

"What a powerful preacher he would make," remarked another.

CHAPTER IV

FATEFUL PROMISE

IT was a few weeks after this that a messenger came to the college in great haste, handed a note to the director, who read it and then sent for Victor.

"My son, you must prepare yourself to go home at once; your mother is very ill," said the director.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the young man, turning pale and leaning on the director's desk.

Soon after, Victor, with tears in his eyes, was on his way home, urging the driver to go faster.

"What is mother's illness?" he asked.

"Bad cold on the lungs, and Doctor Lenoir says it may kill her."

Sorrow bowed the boy's head until they reached home, where at the door he was met by his father, who told him

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that his mother was dying, and had been asking for him during the last few hours.

"Mother!" cried Victor, bending over the wasted form of the dying woman, who painfully raised her arms and placed them around her only son's head, while her parched and feverish lips kissed his forehead.

"Victor! Victor! my good son Victor, I'll die happy now that God brought you to me."

"Mother, don't speak that way; don't say you will die; no, no, it cannot be! You must not die; we can't spare you, mother; no, don't go. Say you will not! God is too good to take you away from us!" and kneeling by her bed, Victor was the picture of despair, while his heart was pierced by the cruel agony that can be imagined only by one who has seen his mother die.

"Don't cry, my boy; it is God's will, and I shall die happy if you will promise me one thing, Victor—promise me—that——" She had spoken too much, and her breath was so rapid

FATEFUL PROMISE

that she could say no more for a few minutes; then taking her son's hands in hers, and looking him in the eyes, she spoke again.

"Victor, you will promise me before I die, will you, my son?"

"Mother—I will promise you anything."

"Thank God! Victor, promise me to become a priest."

"I become a priest, mother!" cried the son in fearful agony.

"Yes; promise me that, my boy; because when you were a baby your father and I promised to God that you would be a priest; and we could never enter heaven unless our promise is fulfilled."

"Oh, mother! mother!"

"Promise, my son. Let me die happy—it is the last request of your dying mother," and, exhausted by the strain of the conversation, she closed her eyes. A deathlike pallor came over her face, while beads of cold sweat formed upon her forehead, and Victor thought that his mother was dead.

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But again she opened her eyes and her glance slowly rose to his face. It was such a pleading light that shone in her eyes, while she whispered her request again, that Victor could not resist it, and bending over her he said:

“Mother, I promise you to be a priest.”

A happy smile played over her pinched face, and with feeble and trembling hands she reached for a small crucifix while with her eyes she made Victor understand that she wanted him to pledge himself by solemnly kissing the brass image of crucified Christ. Victor's lips were still upon the cold metal when his mother gasped her last breath, dying with a happy smile upon her face, a smile brought by the terrible religious fanaticism that knows no limit in its demands. The cold, glassy eyes of the dead woman seemed to be staring at Victor's face as he stood near the bed, broken-hearted by the loss of his mother and stunned by his great sacrifice to religion.

Three days later Victor with his

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father and friends of the family followed the remains of his mother to the little village church where the last rites of the Catholic religion were performed. The windows of the church were decorated with black crepe, and had it not been for the light from the tallow candles it would have been absolutely dark. The flickering rays from the candles were just sufficient to give the funeral scene a weird and uncanny air. At the end of the service, when the "Libera" was intoned and when the old priest sprinkled the coffin with holy water, some of the lights flickered and went out. And when the priest said the last "Requiescat in pace," there were only a few short candles burning.

The service over, the coffin was carried to the prepared grave in the cemetery, where it was lowered with ropes that stretched under the strain. Following the custom of the time, parents and friends picked up small pieces of frozen ground and dropped them upon the coffin. As Victor stood back of the little crowd, hearing the sound of the

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frozen pieces of soil as they fell on his mother's coffin, he wished that they were falling on his own, so great was his sorrow and despair.

After a sleepless night, as the first rays of the sun shone through the tall, leafless trees into his room, Victor wrote the following words to the girl who was anxiously expecting to see him on that day:

“Marie-Louise:

“My heart is broken and my soul is mine no more. At the request of my dying mother I promised to become a priest. The love that we both nursed since our childhood I must now forget, if I can. The hopes that we cherished will not materialize and the dreamed-of sunshine of the future has been changed into the deep darkness of despair. Instead of wedding my beloved, I shall be wedded to the church; but, Marie-Louise, soul of my soul, don't blame me; pity me. How could I refuse the last imploring request of my mother? Think of it; with my lips

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upon the crucifix, I sealed the fate of my life! Before I had time to realize the immensity of the sacrifice I was compelled to make, the warmth of life had left her. The cruelty of the deed dawned upon my soul, but it was too late—too late—Marie-Louise; I could not ask her to let me take back my promise. Pity me. Yes, and pray for me, Marie-Louise! You, also, will suffer, I know; but while I wander through the narrow path of priesthood's life, like a lost soul, you can at least travel over the road of our childhood days where love placed flowers on the wayside; you can pluck some roses as we did in former years; and you can, in remembrance, live over those happy days. But think of me! I shall have to fight the very remembrance of those happy days. Will your image, so deeply engraved in my heart, ever vanish? No! Marie-Louise; when God placed the love of you in my soul would he condemn me because it remained there? I shall try to be a good priest, but I swear to you,

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Marie-Louise, that when I die the only flower of love that ever took root in my heart shall still be there! It will be there in all its purity, and if the doors of Paradise were to be closed to me on account of it, Marie-Louise, I would cheerfully go down to hell! Great God! what about you? Will you love someone else? Oh! the torture of that thought! No—you will not! You will not love anyone else as you love me, will you, Marie-Louise? Do you remember that day you said that if I ever became a priest you would become a nun? Forgive me for recalling such a thing to you. I have no right to cast the shadow of my misfortune over your life, and I should ask you to forget me—but how can I? No—don't forget me—don't!

“My reason weakens; I must write no more. Forgive my weakness; I am only human. Good-by. I will let my tears fall upon the bottom of this page, so that yours will mingle with mine, and I will kiss this space, kiss it with the despair of a man who knows he is

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sinking for the last time; kiss it, that your lips may touch where mine have!

"God bless you, Marie-Louise. Remember me in your prayers.

"VICTOR."

Upon his return to college Victor immediately went to the director and informed him of the promise made to his mother.

"The last words of your mother were certainly dictated to her by Divine Providence," said the director. "May God Almighty help you to become worthy of the holy office which you will enter, and may the talents you possess be used to the best interest of our holy religion. From this time you must exert yourself to banish from your heart all earthly sentiments, and to facilitate the bringing about of that condition you will enter 'en retraite' to-morrow morning for a period of two weeks, spending your time in prayers and pious readings."

When Victor with bowed head walked out of the director's room the

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old priest added these words: "Be courageous, my son; don't let Satan disturb your peace of mind. Should you feel weakness enter your soul, come to me."

Victor went directly to the chapel, walking like a man who carries too heavy a burden. After dipping his fingers in the holy water and crossing himself, "*in nomine Patri et Filio et Spiritu Sancto, Amen*," he walked to the central altar and knelt down, beginning his prayer by saying "Veni, Sancte Spiritus, et emitte coelitus lucis tue radium," an imploration for light from the Holy Spirit.

After praying a long while, he felt the soothing influence that could be brought only by religious fervor, and as he looked up to the image of Christ upon the Cross, above the altar, the painful but sweet expression of the Saviour's face impressed him more than ever before. When he left the chapel he was almost satisfied to make his sacrifice for Christ's sake. A strange conversion was taking place in his dis-

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turbed mind; and the characteristic energy of his nature asserted itself by grasping the opportunity offered by religion to find peace in making his sacrifice.

CHAPTER V

DR. LENOIR'S TRAGIC DEATH

VICTOR'S letter was handed to Marie-Louise by her father, and recognizing the writing, she went up to her room to read it in solitude, while the old doctor sat in his office reading the papers.

Suddenly the heavy thud of a body falling on the floor caused the doctor to drop his papers and run up-stairs to the room from which the noise came, calling "Marie-Louise! Marie-Louise!" but no answer came. When the doctor entered the room he found her insensible on the floor, and holding in her hands Victor's letter. In a few moments the doctor had restored her, and had laid her on her bed, while her mother was bathing her face with cold water.

"What's the matter, child?" asked the father, bending over his daughter

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and seeing tears flowing from her eyes.

"Oh! Papa! Papa! Read this!" and she gave him the letter.

After reading it, the doctor exclaimed: "The poor fellow! they have filled him with religion until he is a damned fool!"

"But I love him so much—so much, father!"

"Never mind, child; I will go and see Monsieur le Curé, and I will have him go to Nicolet and undo that infernal scheme to compel him to be a priest! It's the greatest outrage I have ever heard of. Why, Victor's mother was nothing but a religious maniac when she died, and the curé knows it, too. I will go and see him right now. Console yourself, my girl, your father will arrange this matter," and the old doctor started to call on the old curé.

The life of Dr. Lenoir had been made up of earnest, studious, useful years, bestowed faithfully for the relief of the sick; and while of a quick temper, and possessing religious ideas that conflicted with those of the times,

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he was thoughtful for others, craving little for himself. He was above the superstition common to those around him, but he now felt that its influence was dwelling upon his child like a curse, and the unfortunate father realized that the terrible condition had been brought about by the old priest whom he was on his way to see. He knew that it was still possible for Father Morin to rescue Victor from the miserable fate he had been led to, but being aware how deeply imbued was the old curé with false religious ideas he felt that he might not succeed in overcoming that subtle and fanatical determination to have Victor become a priest. As he was nearing the curé's home the possibilities of failing in his errand seemed to increase, and he felt as if his soul were on fire; and when at the curé's door, the fire was smouldering in his breast. After entering, his emotion was so great that for an instant he stood without saying a word, before the priest.

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"What's the matter?" asked the surprised old priest.

"Matter! There's lots the matter! There has been some infernal work going on lately, and I have come to see if you will do something to restore things as they should be."

"What do you mean, Doctor?"

"I mean that a young man's life is likely to be ruined by the foolish fanaticism of a woman crazed by religion, who, before dying, made her son promise to become a priest, and the victim is Victor Dorion, my daughter's fiancé!"

"Doctor—Doctor—I am surprised to hear you speak in such a disrespectful manner about God's will. It was indeed by an act of the Divine Providence that the life of Victor's mother was spared until he arrived, so that she could make him promise to fulfill God's will; and nothing in the world would save him from eternal damnation if he should not be true to the pledge made to his dying mother."

"His dying mother was only a religious maniac," said the doctor trem-

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blingly, and hardly able to control his temper, "and what right had she—and have you—to compel Victor to follow a vocation that is not his? Why don't you let him be true to his nature? Why don't you go to him and tell him that the promise to his mother is not binding and that it is for him to decide what his vocation shall be?"

"As a minister of God, it is my duty to help him to enter the sacred order of priesthood, and notwithstanding what you may say, I will do my duty, Doctor Lenoir."

"Damn your duty! You don't know what your duty is," answered the doctor, losing his temper.

"What's that! You are blaspheming! Be careful, Doctor Lenoir! Remember that I am one of God's representatives, and who insults me insults Him!"

"You? God's representative! Your actions lead one to believe that it would be more truthful if you said, 'Satan's representative.'"

"Get out of my place! Get out

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quick, before God strikes you dead in punishment for your sacrilegious talk."

"I will get out, but if you, old fool, will not have the manhood to go and rescue Victor from the terrible danger you have helped to place him in, I will go myself. I will go and tell him that his poor mother was the victim of excessive religious enthusiasm and an unbalanced believer in your barbaric teachings. I will tell him that her last words were suggested by such miserable fanatics as you are," and, as the doctor walked out, the priest said piously:

"God have mercy on your soul!"

"Pray for your own soul—mine is in no danger," were the doctor's last words as he left the presbytery.

Arrived at his home, he informed his wife and daughter that he was going to Nicolet at once.

Always a hard driver, still never before had the old doctor driven his horse so fast as while going to Nicolet that day; and when he arrived at the college the harness could hardly be seen

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so thick was the foam on his faithful animal.

After ringing two or three times in quick succession, the door of the college was opened by a sleepy door-keeper, who asked the doctor to step into the "parloir."

"I want to see Victor Dorion right away," said the doctor, but he was informed that he would have to see the director first and from him obtain permission.

"Well, tell the director that I want to see him at once."

After waiting quite a while, the director came in, and was surprised at the strange expression of the doctor's face, whom he knew well, as they had been classmates.

"What's the matter, Dr. Lenoir?" asked the priest.

"I must see Victor Dorion at once."

"Is his father sick?"

"No, but I want to see him for private reasons."

"I am very sorry, Doctor, but Victor is 'en retraite,' and no one is allowed to

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speak to him; such are the rules of this institution, as you must know."

"To hell with the rules of this institution! I want to see Victor Dorion at once."

"You will not see Victor Dorion, Doctor, and I am surprised at your way of talking."

"Never mind my way talking; it is important that I should at once talk to Victor."

"Unless you state reasons of enough importance to permit the breaking of our regulations, you will certainly not see him."

"Well, if you must know, he is the victim of an infernal plot to compel him to become a priest, and I want to open his eyes. I want to tell him that as a physician I can certify that his mother was not responsible for her actions when she made him promise to become a priest. I want to save him from a life of disgrace and misery. I know that he was not born to be a priest. He was engaged to my daughter. Do you understand now?"

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"You will certainly not see Victor Dorion," answered the director in a decided manner.

"Oh! You will not let me speak to him, eh? Well, you will be sorry for this some day; remember what I say!" Convinced that he would not be allowed to see Victor, Dr. Lenoir left the college to return home, disgusted and swearing at the state of ignorance that permitted such outrages to take place in the name of Christianity.

"The fools would not let me see Victor," was all he said to his wife and Marie-Louise.

From this time Dr. Lenoir was never seen inside the little Catholic church; but strange as it may seem he had no objection to his wife and daughter going to church, and even to confession.

"Pray for the conversion of your husband," said the old curé to the doctor's wife; to Marie-Louise he advised resignation to God's will. The poor broken-hearted girl became reconciled to her unfortunate fate, and under the

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guidance of her spiritual adviser she decided to enter a convent for life.

When Dr. Lenoir was informed by his wife of Marie-Louise's intention to become a nun, he flew into uncontrollable rage and paced the floor, cursing the village priest and priesthood in general; and then he broke down and cried like a child.

"No—no; never will I consent to have my only child imprisoned for life in a convent;" he said; and he called Louise, who came and knelt at his feet, resting her head upon his knees.

"Leelie," he called her, as he used to when she was a little girl, tenderly rubbing her hair, "Leelie, you will not go away from your old father, will you, child? Look at my white hair. See how old I am getting, and when I need you so much, you, my sunshine, you, my only child, will you abandon me? Can't the last days of my life be lived with you near me? What have I done to bring upon me such misfortune? No, Louise; you'll not go into a convent while your father is alive, say you will

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not," and with a tenderness that no one would have supposed him to be capable of, he held his daughter's face in his hands while pleadingly looking into her eyes.

"Oh! Father! Father! Why should we be so unhappy?"

"Why?" he repeated. "Why? Because we are the victims of religious fanaticism. The religion we are taught is not Christ's religion; it is only a poor imitation of it, and instead of bringing happiness and satisfaction it brings misery and misfortune. The true Catholic religion is good, but it is in the hands of pirates, my child; and instead of striving to enlighten us, they lead us into darkness. God said: 'Love one another,' but these peddlers of religion tell us that it is a sin. Was there ever a purer love than your's and Victor's? Still, they made the poor innocent boy believe that he must sacrifice his love to enter their ranks, and now they are trying to have you abandon your father and mother, after breaking your poor heart. Is that Christianity? If it is,

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"I don't want to be a Christian." He would have said more, but his hands dropped limp upon his knees and his head fell forward. He was unconscious, and would have fallen to the floor had not Marie-Louise held him up.

"Father! Father!" she said, "wake up! Look at me! I am Leelie! I will stay with you—yes, I promise it! Oh! Father! speak! speak!"

Just then he opened his eyes, and pointing with his trembling hand to his heart, he said, "I am dying, Louise, kiss me—and promise me that you will never enter a convent."

"Papa! Father! Don't die—I promise you that I will not go to a convent; no, never, never!"

As a strange smile of satisfaction came over his face he whispered, "Leelie, thank you—my child—kiss me good-by."

She kissed him, but his lips were already growing cold and death had claimed the life of a noble man.

When the old parish priest, who had

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been sent for by the doctor's wife, arrived, the doctor had been dead many minutes. In his death the old priest saw the punishment of the Divine Providence, and later refused to let the body be interred in the Catholic cemetery, claiming that Doctor Lenoir had died an infidel.

The remains of Dr. Lenoir, who had spent his life doing good in the little parish, were buried in the space of land reserved for children dead without baptism, or persons who died outside of the folds of the Catholic religion.

The memory of his good deeds was blighted by the weird belief that his soul was damned, and his sterling qualities were forgotten amid the rush of adverse religious influences. Only a few among these people felt their hearts throbbing in sympathy with the spirit that pervaded the remembrance of that staunch man.

From this time Marie-Louise and her mother lived a life of seclusion, going through life with the stigma left by the tragic death of the doctor, who was

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buried without a religious ceremony
and whose soul was supposed to be
damned for all eternity.

CHAPTER VI

KEEPING HIS VOW

VICTOR was ignorant of the cause of the doctor's death, but a great sorrow entered his soul when he was informed of it, and every day part of his prayers were offered for the repose of the soul of Marie-Louise's father.

His "retraite" was over, and he had reached that stage of religious enthusiasm when one is almost glad to suffer any sorrow and make any sacrifice for the sake of his faith. While his whole being was still imbued with the sadness of the past events like the germs of some malignant disease that lurk in one's system even after proper antidotes have been taken, still he was more resigned to his faith; and the priests of the institution were satisfied that a change was taking place in his nature.

At the end of the school year, when

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all the students were enjoying the happiness of entering upon their vacation, Victor was requested by his director to remain in the college and take the habit of priesthood, the black robe called "soutane."

A more magnificent specimen of manhood had never worn the black garment of priesthood; the beauty of his face had never appeared to better advantage; and when he entered the director's room the old priest could not help but admire him.

"My son," said the director, "it will be within your power to accomplish much good in your chosen profession, and may God assist you and keep you in the right road."

"I will do my best, Monsieur le Directeur," answered the young ecclesiast.

The days of his novitiate were uneventful, except that the continual conflict was going on between his sense of religious duty and his love for Marie-Louise; but under the circumstances religion seemed to have the best of the contest, because in moments of temp-

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tation he had recourse to prayer with effectual results.

At one time he was seriously thinking of entering a monastery to become a monk, hoping that the rigidity of the rules of such orders might prevent these spells of longing to see Marie-Louise. But unconsciously the thought that then he would never have a chance to look upon her face prevented him from carrying out that idea, and he terminated his novitiate in the institution in which he had commenced his great sacrifice.

He had gone through the "sous-diaconat," the "acolytat," the "exorcistat," and the "ostirariatus," these being the minor orders preparatory to entering priesthood, and the time for his ordination had arrived.

The ceremony of ordaining is always impressive, but when Victor was ordained it seemed that there was more pomp than ever displayed in the college of Nicolet at such ceremonies. The little chapel was brightly decorated, and when the Bishop, in all the

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splendor of his pompous robes, adorned with golden trimmings, entered, accompanied by many priests, the scene was remindful of the days of Louis XVI when the court costumes were marvelous and gorgeous.

The many details of the ceremony kept Victor in a state of religious enthusiasm such as can be compared to a vivid dream, and when the words "*Quorum remiseritis peccata*" reached his ears and made him realize that what was going on was no dream, and that he was given the power to bestow the pardon of sins, and invested with all the powers of priesthood, he felt a terrible pain at his heart, while his whole body became covered by a cold sweat. For an instant he shook as if suffering from a spell of ague, and at that moment the picture of Marie-Louise was so intensely vivid in his soul that he could think of nothing else but of the girl he had no more right to love.

"*Dominus vobiscum,*" sang out the Bishop, facing the kneeling crowd, which rose and answered, "*Et cum*

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Spiritu tuo," but Victor alone remained on his knees until the priest next to him touched him on the shoulder. Then, as if recovering from a spell, he rose and joined the religious singing, and his thoughts of Marie-Louise were lost for a while in his religious ardor.

After the ceremony his old father was waiting at the chapel door, anxious to hold in his own the hand of his son now a priest. When Victor appeared, so great was the old man's joy that tears of happiness blurred his view, and he could not speak while grasping his son's hand. The old parish curé, a mere tottering old man in his second infancy, joined them and said: "If his poor mother were alive, how happy she would be!"

"If she were alive, would I be a priest?" thought Victor.

CHAPTER VII

TEMPTATIONS

VICTOR was given the Professorship of Philosophy, and was made one of the college faculty.

While enjoying the freedom given to the priests of such an institution, Victor was surprised and almost demoralized to find that the low burning fire of his love for Marie-Louise was reviving in spite of all efforts to the contrary, and in despair he decided to consult the director about his moral condition.

The kind old priest after listening to him, said:

“It is the temptation of Satan, my son. Do not let it worry you, but pray. The spirit is strong, but the flesh is weak. You will find moral tranquillity if you chastise your flesh. Fast and pray, and Satan will retreat, and if once he sees that he cannot afflict you any

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longer he will give up, and you will have conquered the flesh. You are not the first one, my son, who has been subjected to these attacks of Satan shortly after entering the holy order of priesthood; but the harder the fight, the greater the victory. Go in peace, my son, and pray the Holy Virgin to keep your soul pure and free from temptation, and ask your guardian angel to keep away from you the evil thoughts that might again disturb your peace of mind and heart."

The assurance of the dignified old man who spoke such kind words made the young priest hope for better days, and following the director's advice he decided upon a systematic course of fasting and chastisement of his flesh. When after that the picture of Marie-Louise faintly came to his mind he went to his room, where he prayed fervently, and after removing his clothes he would, upon the bare flesh of his body, lash himself with a "cordon de St. Joseph" until red ridges stood out and blood ran down in big drops.

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This barbarous treatment, combined with days of entire fasting, brought the young priest to a point of weakness so great that it was noticeable. But strange as it may appear, the weaker his body became the stronger his thoughts of Marie-Louise took hold of his soul, and when exhausted from these terrible ordeals he often found himself lying on the bare floor of his room filled with strange happiness born of intense love. Once after a most terrible punishment he passed into a state of semidelirium, out of which he came holding the picture of the Holy Virgin, kissing it and calling it Marie-Louise.

When at night he was awakened by the sores on his body, they seemed to remind him of the very person he wanted to forget. At last Victor Dorion, the young priest, came to the conclusion that his mind would not stand the strain of such a struggle, and a complete change took place in his life. He ceased to chastise his body, and earnestly as he had fought against his love for Marie-Louise, so eagerly he now

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nursed and encouraged it, and again he let her voice come to him in the silence of the night, and her smile shine brightly in his soul. In his lonely heart she took back her place as of old, and from this time Victor lived a double life.

At the altar, robed in white surplice and the gilded robes of priesthood, he was the pious minister of God, performing the religious rites of the Catholic religion, with power to change wine into the blood of Christ. In the pulpit, he was the eloquent preacher, whose words carried conviction to those who heard him. But at other times, when in the solitude of his room, or when wandering through the forest of tall pines back of the college, Victor was again the lover and dreamer into whose eyes the love-light came and went. The power of religion had failed to vanquish the love that came to his heart in the spring-time of his life, and, victim of an unkind fate, he found satisfaction in the remembrance of the

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days when life was made more beautiful by the hope of love.

In his lonely heart lingered the sweet fragrance of the flowers, tokens of love, that Marie-Louise had so often given him, and like a lover of nature who had lost his sight but still remembers her beauties, so Victor enjoyed the memory of the love that had filled his soul, and often he pressed his lips upon roses in memory of her. The teachings of theology were things that reached only his brain, but made no impression upon his heart. Oftentimes, while reading his breviary in the shade of some big oak tree, the Latin book was dropped upon his knees while his mind wandered back to the days when on the shores of the St. Lawrence he sat under the trees with Marie-Louise.

The intense religious fervor that followed his ordination had slowly subsided and given place to a reaction such as usually follows forced and imposed emotion. As months and years passed by a feeling of doubt crept into his mind as to the right of religion to inter-

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fere with the laws of nature, and each time that he went to his native village where he chanced to see the sad-faced girl of his heart—a martyr to her first love—dressed in black and bowed under the grief of her misfortune, he came back to the college with a feeling akin to hatred for a religion that permitted such sacrifice to its fanaticism. Whenever he was called upon to preach his sermons lacked the intolerance of the teachings of those days, and were remarkable for their charitable utterances, so much so that he was more than once reprimanded by his superiors.

It had been more than five years since Victor had entered the order of priesthood, and these years had been lived in a state of perpetual struggle between love and duty. While to all appearances he had been a good priest, still he was convinced that his vocation had been a failure. But what could he do?"

About this time a letter from his old

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friend Louis Pichette, who had graduated in medicine, informed him that he had bought old Doctor Lenoir's office with the purpose of locating in Victor's native village. In the letter the young doctor wrote, "I have already taken possession of the old doctor's books and instruments and I wish I could also take possession of his daughter, Marie-Louise, who is a shy bird. I am afraid that she is too good for any such fellow as I, but I am going to be nice to her mother, and if I win the affection of the old lady I may in time succeed in winning the daughter. Say, by the way, you used to know her, did you not? Tell me, don't you think she would make a good wife?"

After reading this letter Victor felt a strange heat creeping to his head; and clenching his fists, he gritted his teeth in a way that meant much.

"Great God! My old friend Louis loves her! Oh, no! I can't stand this—it's too much!"

A few days later Victor went to the director and informed him that he had

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decided to accept the offer which had been made him, namely, to go and take the place of the old curé in his native village.

"Very well, I am glad you have made up your mind to go and take the place of your old protector and friend, who will be glad to see his parish in your hands. The parish is a rich one, and I am surprised at your hesitation about accepting it. We shall be sorry here to lose you, but we must submit to the will of Providence."

Shortly after this the young priest arrived in his native village to take the place of the old parish priest, who had reached such a state of senile feebleness as to render him altogether unfit to act longer as curé. When Victor came to him the old priest said, with tears in his eyes:

"Thank God for sending you to take my place, and may you faithfully do your duty."

The young priest sat limply in the chair facing the old curé, but he was thinking so intensely of other things be-

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sides the duties of his new position that he hardly realized what the old priest was saying.

One of the first to call on the new curé was Dr. Pichette, who was surprised at the cold and dignified way in which he was received; but he attributed this change of manners on the part of his college chum to the fact that dignity is a necessity to priesthood.

On the following Sunday Victor officiated at high mass. When the old curé painfully ascended to the pulpit to address his parishioners for the last time and bid them a last farewell, an atmosphere of sorrow seemed to pervade the little church, and many shed tears when the old priest gave the last blessing.

“No more will you hear my feeble voice—no more will I baptize your children—no more will I marry your sons and daughters. But, in my place, God sent you a young priest, child of this village, and my favorite ‘protégé.’ Obey him as you have me, and we shall all meet in heaven. Such is the most

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earnest wish of your old curé. In nomine Patri et Filio et Spiritu Sancto, Amen."

The next day the old curé took his departure to go and live the rest of his days in a hospital for old and feeble priests, and Victor was the curé of his native village.

Aimé Dorion, old and deaf, had been confined to his home for a long time by senile debility, but he found enough energy to get up and insist upon being driven to the presbytery where, with all the satisfied pride of his narrow soul, he fully enjoyed the mellow happiness of seeing his son the parish-priest of his village. As he sat looking at the pale, care-worn face of his son a great feeling of thankfulness came on his soul, and falling upon his knees the old man thanked God for having fulfilled his wish, confident that the doors of heaven would be thrown open for him when he passed away from this world.

When Aimé Dorion went back to his home it was for the last time. The

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strain caused by his trip to the presbytery had been too much for his worn-out body and he was compelled to go to bed. Next day his condition was such that Dr. Pichette was sent for and the medical man found that Victor's father had not long to live, and advised that the priest be sent for at once.

When Victor arrived he was surprised at the deathlike appearance of his father, to whom he could not speak, as the old man's deafness was such that it was impossible to make him hear. The young priest wrote a few words upon a piece of paper, warning his father of his dangerous state, and when the old man read them a strange expression came over his yellow face. The expression was one of mingled sorrow and satisfaction. It meant that he was sorry to die when he could have so much enjoyed seeing his son in priesthood, and it also meant that he was almost satisfied to die, because of a feeling of certainty as to his salvation, knowing that his son would, as a priest,

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administer to him all the necessary rites provided by his religion.

"I want to confess my sins before I die," spoke up the old man, and Victor, the priest, was compelled to listen to the confession of his father. A strange sight it was to see the father calling his son "Father," but in the Catholic Church the confessor is always called "Father." When Aimé Dorion's confession was concluded a cold sweat covered his face, and the gloss of his eyes indicated that the supreme moment was not far, while his son administered the last sacraments.

Death came while the young priest was reciting the litanies of the dying, and after closing the eyes of his dead father Victor left the remains in charge of friends.

Having returned to the presbytery, Victor was surprised at the almost indifferent state in which he found himself after witnessing his father's death. He felt none of the bitter sorrow which he had so keenly experienced at his mother's death; and later when the

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time came to officiate at his father's funeral service in the little church, he acted more as if officiating at a stranger's funeral than at his own father's; and more than once his glance wandered from the black cloth-covered coffin to the kneeling form of a woman, whom he remembered having seen once before in the same attitude at his mother's funeral.

A few weeks after the funeral of Aimé Dorion the people of the little village began to whisper about having heard noises in the old homestead of the Dorions, which had been closed since the old man's death. The rumor that the house was haunted was soon common gossip, intensified by the superstition of the times, and when one night a light was seen in the old house it left no doubt in the minds of these ignorant people that the house was indeed visited by supernatural beings, and those who drove by at night hurried and crossed themselves. Why should the house be haunted? No one

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seemed to know, but that such was the case they had no doubt.

When these rumors reached the young priest he could not help but smile as he realized that he had been unknowingly the cause of these rumors by often going after dark into his father's house, where in the solitude of the old place his mind wandered back to the days of his boyhood. Long into the night he loved to sit at the window, dreaming of the happy days of the years gone by; in fact, during these moments of reverie he lived with the phantom of his boyhood days, and when he realized the comments caused by his nocturnal visits to the old homestead it keenly brought to him the fact that these people were indeed living in an age of superstition and ignorance.

As he was thinking over the advisability of informing his parishioners about their mistake, a new idea flashed through his mind which caused his face to flush with excitement. Why could he not live the happy life of the old days in reality, by having Marie-

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Louise meet him in the old home after darkness, thereby taking advantage of the fearful superstition of his parishioners, who certainly would not disturb him and his sweetheart? Why not remove his cassock and enjoy the illusion? Had they not suffered enough during all these years of unsatisfied love? At the thought of meeting her alone a glowing brightness came into his eyes and a fiery tingling passed over his whole body, and never before had he felt so much that indeed he was the slave of his love. What of the sin of such an unpriestly action? Little he seemed to care about that part, if only he could induce Marie-Louise to meet him after dark at the old home. His heart was no longer the grave of a buried desire.

It was while thinking over these things, sitting in his presbytery, that someone timidly knocked at his door. As he opened it he was surprised to see Marie-Louise's mother, sad, but sweet-faced, with premature white hair.

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After offering her a chair he asked her what he could do for her.

"Monsieur le Curé, I came to ask you a great favor," looking at him pleadingly.

"Don't fear to ask me anything."

"I am getting old and I fear that I shall soon pass away from this world; and when I die I should want to rest by my poor husband, who, as you know, was refused a sepulchre in the cemetery. Can you intercede for me to the Bishop and have a dispensation permitting the remains of my dear husband to be interred in the cemetery? you know that he was not a bad man, and that he did much good while living. Why should his remains be refused a Christian resting place? Can you, Monsieur le Curé, obtain a dispensation? For my sake and my daughter's?"

"Madame Lenoir, I assure you that the remains of my esteemed old friend, Dr. Lenoir, will be removed from where they are into the cemetery, and this shall be done very soon."

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"Thank you—ever so much! You are very kind to us, Monsieur le Curé," answered the widow, her gratitude shining through her tears.

Left alone Victor felt bitterly the injustice done by religious frenzy to the noble father of Marie-Louise. "And this is done in the name of Christ, who came to teach charity," he said to himself.

One morning a few days later as he was sitting in the confessional listening to the confessions of the parishioners who were to receive communion that morning, Victor felt his blood chilled at the glance of a penitent who had entered the confessional and who was reciting her "confiteor." In the semi-darkness of the confessional he saw the sorrowful brown eyes of Marie-Louise, and the sight of her grief-stricken face gave rise in his soul to bitter rage against the very religion of which he was a minister. Unable to restrain himself, he half rose from his seat, and laying his hand upon the little perforated partition between Marie-Louise

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and himself as if in the act of commanding her to stop, he said: "Marie-Louise, you need not confess yourself to me. You are too good to kneel at my feet. Go in peace. Your sins are forgiven."

"Father! what do you mean?" she asked, her face dead-white, like a dead woman's face, except for her sad but bright brown eyes.

"I must see you after mass. Come to the presbytery," he said as he bent forward, the fire of his great love shining brightly through his eyes and sending forth an indescribable thrill through her whole being. Half dazed, she got up and slowly walked to the church, as if dreaming.

"I will hear no more confessions to-day," said the priest to those who had expected to be heard that morning, and he prepared himself to celebrate low mass.

All during the divine service he was in such a state that many must have noticed the strange expression of his face, especially when he came down

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from the altar to the holy table to give communion to the few who had received the absolution of their sins. Marie-Louise was not among them.

After mass he hurried to the presbytery, where a few minutes later Marie-Louise came in, pale as if terror-stricken. Without a word she sat down while the young priest stood looking pitifully and tenderly at her, apparently unable to speak, but after a few moments, stepping closer to her, he began:

"Marie-Louise, my promise to my parents to become a priest has been fulfilled. They are both dead, and the life we both have lived has been worse than death, for me at least. Out of the past comes a crowd of memories which will never give me any peace in this world. Now that I can see through the haze of religious fanaticism, Marie-Louise, I am confident that it is a sin against nature, yes, against God himself, for you and me to continue to suffer! Such as I am, I can never be a good priest.

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But I could still be a good man! Yes, Marie-Louise, a good husband!"

"My God!" she exclaimed; and her face became so pallid that her big brown eyes looked almost black and seemed unnaturally large. But as he stood bending over her, speaking with all the strength of his passionate love, her color came back, and with it her old-time beauty, tender and strange. And from this moment Victor was not only her lover, but also her master.

When she walked home a new brightness was glowing in her eyes and the vast horizon of a new life was spreading before her. Religion itself was now powerless before their love. When night came the black-robed form of a man was seen going towards the haunted house, and later, when the pale silvery light of the moon had softened the darkness of the night in the tall pines on the shores of the St. Lawrence, the graceful form of a woman was hurriedly moving in the same direction.

CHAPTER VIII

FATHER DORION'S TROUBLES WITH HIS PARISHIONERS

GREAT was the astonishment of his parishioners when Father Victor Dorion announced from the pulpit that the remains of the late Doctor Lenoir were to be removed into the cemetery and interred under the regular religious ceremonies of the church.

Another announcement that also created much surprise was the reading of the first notice of "banns" of the future marriage of Dr. Louis Pichette to the daughter of a well-to-do farmer of the village. It was a surprise because it had been generally believed that Dr. Pichette would marry Dr. Lenoir's daughter.

After mass groups of parishioners formed in front of the church to discuss the strange decision of the curé in the

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matter of the remains of the late Dr. Lenoir, and almost everybody was greatly shocked by such action. The more they talked it over the more they decided that it was the most sacrilegious thing they had ever heard of.

"Why, just think of burying in the holy ground the remains of a man who died without the last sacraments! An infidel at that, who never went to church during his last years on earth! Sure, he was a good doctor, but there must be something wrong with the curé!" And they decided to write to the Bishop of the diocese about it.

Another one said that he would never consent to have any of his folks or himself buried in the same graveyard where such an infidel as Dr. Lenoir had been, was buried. A great feeling of unrest rose among these people, victims of religious intolerance, with the result that a meeting was called in the village hall the same evening. At the meeting a committee was chosen after much discussion to go and inquire of the curé if he had received a special dispensation

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from the Bishop in the matter, and if not, the same committee was immediately to send a delegate to the Bishop and inform His Grace of the terrible sacrilege contemplated.

During this time Father Victor Dorion gave orders that a grave be dug in the cemetery to receive the remains of Dr. Lenoir, which were to be exhumed the next morning.

Very few were present at the ceremonies of the second interment, and among these some had come prompted more by curiosity than by a feeling of respect for the old doctor, whose soul, they firmly believed, was damned.

The same day in the afternoon a committee of three called upon Father Dorion to ask him to show them the necessary dispensation from the Bishop, permitting the remains of Dr. Lenoir to be buried in the Catholic cemetery.

"What business of yours is it?" asked the priest, looking scornfully at them.

After a moment of hesitation one spoke up: "We've been chosen as a

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committee to find out about this matter."

"Well, what do I care about who sent you here? Why can't you let the dead rest in peace?"

"It's like this, Monsieur le Curé, we have decided that unless a special dispensation was obtained from the Bishop we should not want to have an infidel, a man who died without religion, buried in the same ground where our relatives are resting and where we shall ourselves some day be buried."

"Yes," spoke up another of the committee, "and we have been told that he was a Freemason. Do you think that we want Freemasons to be buried where our children are?"

At this point the young priest lost his temper, and with an angry light in his eyes he looked them in the face in turn, until each one was looking down, unable to stand the terrible gaze of the superior man. Then, his voice trembling with emotion, the priest spoke up, each word falling upon the ears of the

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three standing men like drops of boiling lead:

"You miserable ignorants! Listen to my words. The man whose remains you are afraid will contaminate the rotting bodies of your dead relatives was so much better and nobler than any of you that you are not worthy to speak his name! Under the cloak of religion you presume to pass judgment upon the departed soul of the most intellectual man that ever honored you by living among you. Where is your Christian charity? What of the teachings of the Christ you pretend to love! Like human vultures you have followed to his grave a man who was guilty of nothing against you. You forget that in time of illness many of you received his kind services. Some of you may owe your life to him—but you have forgotten all that, blinded by the fanaticism of your religion. It is such men as you that will go to hell! All the prayers of the church could never wash white the blackness of your prejudiced souls. Christian charity is a meaningless

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word to you, and when you bow your heads in prayer you nurse in your soul such uncharitable feelings as you have displayed in this matter.

"You may tell those you represent that I, upon my own responsibility, ordered the remains to be interred in the cemetery. You may go to the Bishop, but there is no power on earth that can compel me to undo what I consider it was my duty to do. This is all I have to say to you; good-by."

Like whipped curs they marched out without saying a word, overwhelmed by the merciless words of their pastor. Like the sun-rays that will pierce through dirty panes of glass, so the words of the priest pierced their souls. But years of religious intolerance had too thoroughly blunted the keenness of their intellect to permit them to reason on the lines hinted by the young priest, and as they gradually recovered they unanimously agreed that the curé had gone wrong.

When they made their report they simply stated that the curé was angry at

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them for calling upon him, and that he had not received any dispensation from the Bishop.

A few days later Victor received a letter from his Bishop. It was a curt reprimand and an imperative command to re-exhume the remains of Dr. Lenoir and return them to that part of the graveyard reserved for children dead without baptism, and for persons who had died while not in the folds of the Catholic religion. The young priest read the letter many times; then throwing it into the waste basket he walked out to call on Dr. Pichette, whom he found in his office.

"Doctor, I want you to promise me that you will keep secret what I am going to tell you," he said to the doctor.

"You may trust that I will, Victor; what is it?" answered the young doctor, surprised at the serious air of his friend, who told him about the command received from his Bishop in regard to the remains of Dr. Lenoir. "Now," he added, "I want you to help me to dig the coffin out of its grave and place it

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in another in the cemetery. We must leave no trace about the new grave. That will be an easy matter as the soil is sandy, and after carefully placing the coffin and its contents in the new grave we will refill the old grave. You understand?"

"I do," answered Dr. Pichette, "but what's the idea?"

"The idea is this: I am going to resign my curateship here, and when I am gone they will dig the grave where they suppose Dr. Lenoir's remains will be and when they find that there is nothing there the fools will imagine all sorts of things, and my old friend's bones will remain in the cemetery."

"Good for you, Victor! I am proud of you, and I have done that kind of work before. Yes, many a time, you know, when studying medicine, so that it will be a little remembrance of the old days. When shall we go to work?"

"To-night, after 12 o'clock. Come to the presbytery and I will have everything ready for our task. Never a word about this."

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"Never," answered Dr. Pichette.

It is safe to say that never before had such excitement existed in any Canadian village as that which stirred Father Victor Dorion's parish during the time in which these events occurred. Lights were seen burning at night in the haunted house. Many were inclined to believe that the devil himself had taken possession of the place, and when they drove by the tall pines on Aimé Dorion's farm after dark they urged their horses and recited prayers.

The following Sunday long before mass groups of excited men assembled in front of the church, discussing the terrible scandal caused by the curé's action. It was generally known that the Bishop had ordered Father Dorion to remove the remains of Dr. Lenoir from the cemetery, and it was believed that the priest would submit to his superior's orders, and would so announce from the pulpit. When the church bell rang its last call to the people to enter they walked in with an air of mysteri-

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ous expectation, and during the first part of the service an unusual and strange excitement seemed to exist in the little church, which increased as the priest ascended the pulpit to preach his usual Sunday sermon.

Standing in the pulpit facing his congregation, Father Dorion's glance passed over the whole assembly, noticing the great stress in everyone's face.

Slowly he crossed himself, and then announced that this was to be his last sermon to them, and that his text would be, "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you."

Eloquent from the beginning, greater grew his eloquence as he proceeded, until many of his hearers were unable to restrain their tears.

"You mistake barbarism for religion," he said before closing his sermon, "and to your fanaticism you have added superstition. You pretend to practice charity, but you do not know the first quality of that virtue. You forget that Christian charity is like a flower moist with the dew of forgive-

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ness! You forget that Christ, the Son of God, came into this world to teach charity, and that his last words on the cross were a lesson of supreme charity. Your blind fanaticism reaches even beyond this life; its curse, like the poison of a deadly insect, stings the remains of the dead. What right have you—more, what right has the church to pass judgment upon those who have departed this world and have appeared before their Creator?

“Who are you, that you presume to reach beyond the bourne of life? Why should you be afraid that your remains may be contaminated when you die? *Dust thou art and dust thou shalt be.*

“Does it matter if the worms eat your bones near this one or that one? Were you not victims of fanaticism it would not be necessary for me to speak as I do now; but even after you have heard me you will still, I am afraid, fall back into the darkness of your ignorance, and as years go by you will continue to believe in ghosts, and, I dare say, your religious teachings are to some extent to blame.

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“You have been taught that there is a hell of brimstone, and many of you are kept from committing crimes for the fear of it, and for such, hell as an institution is a good thing; but if you understood charity as taught by Christ you would not worry about hell, my poor brothers. Many of your sins would not be sins if your souls were pure. Standing in this church for the last time, my heart bleeds and my soul is overflowing with sorrow for you. A child of this village, I feel keenly the disgrace of your conduct, and I pray God that in his great mercy He will forgive you, for you know not what you are doing.

“When I am gone I do not ask you to pray for me, but I urge you to pray for more charity; and may God Almighty hear your prayers and open your eyes, because He and He alone in his omnipotence can do it.”

A most oppressive silence existed in the church, and as the priest descended from the pulpit each step echoed through all parts of the building. This

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silence was not broken until the priest had reached the altar to finish the mass, when he turned to face the congregation and sang out "Dominus vobiscum," and as his voice floated in the vitiated atmosphere of the crowded church it seemed to arouse them, and while many looked at one another, the choir answered, "Et cum spiritu tuo."

After mass the crowd lingered a few moments in front of the church, still too stupefied to discuss the sermon. Then they gradually dispersed in many different directions, like sheep without a shepherd.

CHAPTER IX

HE ABANDONS PRIESTHOOD

WHEN the Bishop received the resignation of Father Dorion his Grace was greatly surprised and decided to send for the young priest at once, believing that matters could be satisfactorily arranged; but when the next day the Bishop saw Father Dorion standing before him with a determined expression in his face he knew at once that the matter was serious.

After the customary greetings between Bishop and priest, Victor was asked to be seated.

"My son," said the old Bishop, "are you not aware that your action in the matter of Dr. Lenoir's remains is one of great guilt? For two reasons: First, because it is against the rules of the Church; second, because you should not have acted in such an important

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matter without having consulted your Bishop."

"With your Grace's permission, I wish to answer that I was aware that it was against the rule of the Church, and therefore useless to consult you in the matter, unless the Doctor's widow would have been able to pay a sufficient amount of money for a dispensation, which I knew she could not do. Furthermore, I felt convinced, and I do now, that such a rule is not only unjust, but is also inhuman and unchristian. It is a law that conflicts with the very teachings of Christian charity, and it does not emanate from the teachings of Christ," said Father Dorion in a firm voice.

"I am greatly surprised at your words," answered the Bishop, "because you should know that the rules of our Holy Church are the rules of Christ Himself! How dare you presume that in such matters yours is better than the judgment of the Holy Fathers of the Church?"

"Your Grace, I will not discuss these

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matters with you. It is my desire to cease to be a priest because I am firmly convinced that it was an error caused by extravagant notions of religion that I was compelled to enter the priesthood; but it is never too late to rectify a mistake, and no power on earth could change my decision."

"Abomination! My poor man, you will be excommunicated from the Church and be pointed out as a man without honor. Think of the scandal such action will cause. Think of your poor mother, who from heaven will see your disgrace," said the Bishop painfully.

"If my poor mother could advise me, your Grace, I am convinced that she would urge me to abandon my priesthood. How can I be expected to remain a minister of the Catholic Church when I cannot comply with its teachings? I do not deny that the Catholic religion is the true religion, but instead of having progressed with the times, it has retrograded. Instead of throwing light upon moral questions, it has en-

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couraged ignorance and religious frenzy. It has usurped individual rights, and encroached upon the liberty of natural vocation. Victims of fanatical teachings, my parents compelled my young soul to the cruel fate of fighting my natural instincts by entering the priesthood. Encouraged by a priest who should have known better, they blindly urged me to enter a vocation which was not mine. In their irrational enthusiasm they forgot that I was entitled to consideration, and at an age when one's nature is easily led by emotion and one's faculties have not their matured strength, they sacrificed their son upon the altar of religious fanaticism. But, to-day, much as I hate to cause grief to your Grace, I know that I can still be a good man and a useful member of society, while I could never be an acceptable minister of the Catholic religion as it now is. Regardless of the results, I for the last time wear the costume of priesthood.

"I fully realize the fact that you will excommunicate me, and that I may be

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pointed out as a 'défroque,' but I assure you that my faith rests in a higher tribunal than the Church's, and I fear the remorse that, should I remain a priest, would canker my life. I bid your Grace good-by."

Before the Bishop had time to speak the young priest was out of the episcopal residence.

An aged priest was sent to take Victor's place, and at once he set to work quieting the excited people of the little parish, who had no idea where Father Dorion went. Some thought that after being called to the Bishop he had been induced to enter a monastery, where he would do penance for his errors; while others were of the opinion that the young priest had turned out to be a bad man, a 'défroque' (as they call a priest who changes his vocation) or had committed suicide.

While the late happenings were eagerly discussed by the people of the little village Marie-Louise and Victor met each day after sun-down in the supposedly haunted house, where they felt

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perfectly secure from intrusion, and in the stillness of the old home they made plans for the future.

It was about this time that startling reports were heard of the discovery of the wonderful gold mines of California. Many French Canadians were infected by the gold fever and hopefully left Canada for the gold fields of the States to seek fortunes. Victor Dorion, the ex-priest, decided to direct his steps towards the new gold regions.

CHAPTER X

FAREWELL

FOR the last time before his departure Victor was waiting for Marie-Louise, sitting at the window facing the little pathway where she usually came. He felt a strange sadness at the thought of their meeting for the last time, at least for months, and perhaps years, but again his sadness gave place to a great feeling of satisfaction, of that satisfaction that comes to the heart of one who feels that he is doing a noble duty.

As he sat and watched at the window for her coming the soft light from the moon made the shadows of the tall trees appear like big sleeping giants, whose arms seemed to reach far into the woods, and as clouds floated by the moon these shadows slowly vanished in the creeping darkness, which lasted

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only a few moments, then again the strange forms came. It is such a sight as always invites one to wander into dreamland, and under its influence Victor felt as if these shadows might hold Marie-Louise in their arms. Strange to say, he was getting anxious about her, especially when after a spell of darkness the silvery moonlight shone again. But soon out of the newly formed shadows he saw her coming, as if brought out by the shadows themselves.

The white shawl upon her head made her look like a Madonna as the moon's rays played upon her beautiful face.

"At last, dear, you have come! What made you so late?" asked Victor, holding her in his arms.

"Twice I started to come, but each time when near the river I imagined I saw someone watching and following me, and each time I turned back. But the third time I decided to come by another road, and I must have lost my

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way, for it seemed that I should never reach here."

It was late in the same night when Victor and Marie-Louise could have been seen walking slowly on the shores of the St. Lawrence. It was their last walk before his leaving for the States, and the tears that glistened on Marie-Louise's face told of the sorrowful state of her soul.

"Be strong, my sweetheart," said Victor, as they reached the little cross-road where they were to bid each other a parting farewell. "I will return some day to take you away with me, and then we shall be so happy that we will forget the past. Were it not for your dear old mother I would never think of leaving without you, but you must remain with her, nurse her, and make as bright as possible the last years of her life. Remember, Marie-Louise, that nothing but death will ever separate us when I come back. Have faith in the future. You are mine and I am yours."

"Yes, Victor," answered Marie-

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Louise; "but how I dread those days when you will not be here to strengthen me in moments of discouragement. Oh! Victor, Victor, it is so hard to part from you! It is like tearing my heart to pieces, but I know we must part, and you will write often, won't you, dear? You will tell me everything—everything."

"Yes, my dear, I will be with you in spirit every moment. You will fill my heart as when I first went to college, and I will write often. Good-by—God bless you, angel."

After a long embrace they parted, Marie-Louise to walk painfully back to her home, and Victor to face the world, a new man, hopeful for better days.

It was almost daylight when he reached a small place on the St. Lawrence River where the boats stopped to load freight and take passengers to the Canadian metropolis. Dressed in civilian clothes, Victor failed to attract any attention as he got aboard the little steamer, "Sorel." The same day he

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landed in Montreal, whence he started for the Californian gold-fields:

In obedience to the orders from his Bishop, and to please his parishioners, the new village priest ordered that the remains of Dr. Lenoir be removed from the cemetery to their first burial place, and accordingly men were set to work to accomplish the task. But after digging deeper than the usual depth of graves they were amazed at not finding any trace of the coffin they were seeking; and with a feeling of superstitious terror they ran and notified the priest of the condition of things. The priest ordered them to make a larger excavation, thinking that they had not dug at the exact place where the remains had been deposited, but after much digging there was still no trace of the coffin. Like a trail of wild-fire the report that Dr. Lenoir's coffin had simply disappeared traveled through the little village, and great was the amazement of the people.

Some thought that the devil himself

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had taken away the remains, while others believed that the body had been carried away by the ex-curé, Victor Dorion. Rumors of all kinds were circulated, and the new priest found himself unable to offer any satisfactory explanation.

A letter was sent to the Bishop about the matter, and his Episcopal Grace wisely ordered that all search or talk concerning the mysterious happening should cease, under penalty of excommunication, concluding that undoubtedly the hand of Divine Providence had been active in the matter.

During this time Dr. Lenoir's widow was rapidly aging, and her steps were now uncertain and unsteady. Whenever she appeared outside of her house she was supported by her daughter, whose coolness and indifference was the wonder of the people during the general excitement of the time.

It became generally believed that the ghost of the late Dr. Lenoir was making his headquarters at the haunted house, and more than ever were the

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people in terror when passing at night by the beautiful but neglected homestead of the Dorions, and many were the stories of "loup-garous" seen among the tall trees of the haunted farm.

At night when the wind shook the trees, causing strange sounds by the rubbing of the branches, they imagined these noises to be plaintive tones, and it was reported that even horses took fright when driven past the pine trees after dark. School children spoke in whispers about the terrible spirits that haunted the house, and old women fervently prayed upon their strings of beads when the name of Dr. Lenoir was spoken in their presence.

Instead of pitying the widow and her daughter, they considered them too loathsome to hold communion with, and, except Dr. Pichette and his wife, who lived with the Lenoirs, no one dared to have any friendly intercourse with these two recluses.

As time passed by, instead of diminishing, the foolish superstition was in-

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creasing, and it reached a point when Dr. Pichette himself dared not contradict or make light of the general belief, fearing to be classified as a heretic and Freemason.

Slowly but surely the shadow of death was hovering over Lenoir's widow, and when autumn came the martyred woman peacefully passed away.

With a bravery sustained by love, Marie-Louise saw the wasted face of her mother become lifeless, and when she closed her mother's eyes, cold in death, it was with the stoic resignation that could be supported only by her love for Victor. As she went through the dreadful and painful ordeal, his love was the beacon-star that guided her steps.

By a strange freak of fate the remains were interred a few inches only from the grave in which Victor and Dr. Pichette had secretly buried the body of her husband, and in death the husband and wife rested side by side.

Long after the few mourners had

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left the cemetery Marie-Louise stood alone by the fresh grave of her mother, and in a sublime prayer she offered her petition to God that He might help Victor to be successful. Alone in the world, Marie-Louise looked ahead to the time when Victor would come back, hoping for him as a shipwrecked sailor hopes for a boat to come to his rescue. Without the hope and firm belief that he would come this frail woman would have been crushed under the burden of her misfortune; but, woman-like, her love gave her strength to weather the storm, and almost glad of her solitude, she lived for the future's sake.

As days went by she developed the strange notion to wander through the woods near the haunted house after sundown, slowly walking over the same places where she remembered having been with Victor. The rustling of the autumn leaves as they fell seemed to repeat to her ear Victor's pledges, made under the same trees, and it was always with renewed hope that she came back from these nocturnal excursions.

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At other times she wandered into the cemetery, where, upon the grave of her mother, she prayed with all the fervor of her soul for the repose of her parents.

During this time rumors of a new apparition were circulated in the village. It was said that the phantom of the late widow Lenoir had been seen wandering in the night in the cemetery, "seeking the soul of her husband." Some claimed they had come almost face to face with the wandering ghost of a woman, and that, before it vanished, they had been able to notice the strange and painful expression peculiar to Mrs. Lenoir's face during her life. Others said that while they had not seen the phantom's face they had heard the sound of its voice moaning and mingling its sad accents with the low chanting of the tall pines. As time passed by, new tales of ghosts were circulated, and there were only few in the village who dared travel after dark on the road that passed by the haunted house or by the cemetery, and the rising generation learned the mysterious romances of the

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old Dorion farm as they learned their catechism.

It was a common thing to hear the fate of Dr. Lenoir cited as a terrible example of dying without religious benediction, and the doctor's name was synonym for a lost soul.

It was three years since Victor Dorion had mysteriously left his native village, and the serene expression of Marie-Louise's face was a mystery to those who saw her. Some thought that she had lost her reason, but Dr. Pichette and his wife knew that her peaceful appearance was caused by the hope kept fresh in her soul by the letters that came once in a while from the United States, where Victor Dorion was rapidly realizing the object of his expatriation.

CHAPTER XI

VICTOR AS A MINER

FAR into the golden regions of California a small village of miners was quietly rising, and among the miners who dug gold in quantity that later astonished the world, one, a slender and apparently frail man, known as "Vic" among his companions, was recognized as the leader of the little colony, composed mostly of French Canadians. His supremacy was not the result of any scheming faculty, nor because his claim had turned out to be the richest of the lot; but because his kindness had brought rays of sunshine to many during moments of distress when sickness had visited them. It was to him that those who could not write came to have letters written, and in case of accident it was he who carefully bandaged the fractured limbs; and his

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"shanty" was the rendezvous where evenings were delightfully spent in listening to his singing of old French songs that often brought tears to the eyes of those who understood them.

None of them knew where Victor came from, or what his past had been, but all were satisfied to worship him for his great heart and his tenderness and good nature. They were mostly individuals who had gone through experiences such as to disgust them with ordinary pursuits, but who were not yet so old, nor had suffered so much, as to lose their faith in the future. Honest and thoughtful faces were among them; eyes that had not been prematurely dimmed by night studies; and few showed threads of silver in their hair. Some were of marked individuality; and on the whole it was a society such as has seldom met together. They were not all of the Catholic creed, but a spirit of tolerance pervaded their discussions on religion. Hopeful in ultimate success they enjoyed their hard work, and when

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evening came they met and enjoyed themselves in the quietness of their little settlement where deep and true sympathy was abiding.

As time passed by and the success of their search for gold became evident, new gold-seekers came and helped to change the little settlement into a village. And when it was decided to form the organization of the new village Victor was unanimously elected mayor and the new place was named "Victoria."

When the news of the rich findings of the Victoria settlers reached the outside world thousands of men started in the direction of the little village, and as if by magic Victoria sprang into an important and large mining center, where capitalists rushed, anxious to buy interests in some of the claims. But the original few, who had staked their claims first and together, decided to refuse all offers, and as time went on the combined claims owned by these early settlers represented a fabulous fortune, enough to make each one a millionaire.

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Instead of small "shanties," handsome residences were built, and all the blessings of sudden prosperity were in evidence in Victoria.

To Victor Dorion, or "Vic," as they called him, much credit was due for the rapid manner in which this mushroom town took on metropolitan airs; and when newspaper men from San Francisco came to write up the thriving village they were always referred to "Vic," the esteemed mayor. Here are a few lines that appeared in one of the San Francisco dailies of the time:

"Victoria is the most wonderful mining village in California, but still more wonderful is its mayor, 'Vic' Dorion, a Canadian of good education and refined manners. He is the soul of the town and the friend of everybody. It is impossible to learn anything of his past, or where he hailed from. It is believed that he belongs to some distinguished French family who emigrated to Canada, and that there is some romance of love connected with

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his past history, but Mayor 'Vic' has invariably refused to speak of his past, and he is loved for what he is and not what he was."

When Victor read these lines he simply smiled sadly, as it reminded him of those days of moral torture when he lived in his own country.

It was about this time that he wrote this letter to Marie-Louise:

"My Dear and Beloved Marie-Louise: At last the time has arrived for me to go after you and bring you here to be my queen. I will not go into details about my fortune, that is of so little importance when compared with our reunion; but it is big enough to do for both of us, and last us as long as we live. Yes, dear, I have won the battle for you; the gold I have found is yours, because gold without you would be no better than light to the blind. In a few days I shall be on my way to claim you, and, Oh! how I long for the moment when again I can press you to my heart

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and look into your deep brown eyes! I will hurry, dear, and I will not rest until I have you with me. Have patience a little longer, my angel, and soon we shall enjoy our great happiness, the happiness that you deserve so well.

“With my truest and purest love,
I am,

“Yours forever,

“VICTOR.”

When Marie-Louise read this letter she felt such a great wave of happiness come over her soul that she was almost oppressed. The fetters seemed to loosen and fall, and kneeling she thanked God in a mute prayer such as only can come from a true woman who is in love.

Woman-like she could not keep to herself her coming good fortune, and accordingly she read Victor's letter to Dr. Pichette's wife.

A new life seemed to enter her body, and the happy light that shone in her

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usually sad brown eyes told of the happy state in which she was.

As the days passed she grew restless, and she wished that she could fall asleep to awake upon his arrival; but she tried patiently to await his coming by dreaming of their future happiness.

CHAPTER XII

A STRANGER IN THEIR MIDST

It was late on Saturday night when a slender and handsome man with a full beard and all the appearance of a well-to-do American stood at Dr. Pichette's door.

After ringing he held his hand to his heart as if to suppress its too strong beating.

When Dr. Pichette opened the door he was surprised to see a stranger; but after an instant, noticing in the dim light of the candle the tears that shone in the man's eyes, he recognized his old friend, Victor Dorion, and embraced him feelingly in the manner of the French people.

"Marie-Louise—how is she?" was Victor's first question.

"She is well—the dear girl—in bed, dreaming of you, Victor."

"Thank God."

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"Shall I call her?" asked the Doctor.

"Certainly," answered Victor, taking off his coat, while the Doctor hastened to tell his wife to awake Marie-Louise.

A few minutes later Marie-Louise came in, and throwing herself into Victor's arms she was too happy to speak. As they both stood in a loving embrace he tenderly passed his hand over her head, tears of joy glistening in his eyes.

Dr. Pichette and his wife retired, feeling that such happiness was too sacred to be witnessed.

It was far into the night when Marie-Louise and Victor found courage to retire. In the morning when Dr. Pichette and Victor sat together they agreed that his arrival should be kept a secret.

The Doctor told Victor of the rumors of ghosts, and also about the now general and accepted belief that the house of his father was haunted.

After breakfast it was decided that Marie-Louise and the Doctor's wife would go to church together, while Dr.

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Pichette and Victor would walk there together, sure that no one would recognize Victor.

A stranger in the little village never failed to attract considerable attention. One of such distinguished appearance had never before been seen there, and, as it may be imagined, when Victor and the Doctor walked into church many turned around and followed with their eyes the handsome and well-dressed stranger.

Many times during mass Victor felt tears come to his eyes at the remembrance of the past.

After mass Dr. Pichette, as had been agreed, introduced Victor as a scientist from the United States, who had heard about the mysterious apparitions in and about the haunted house, and had come in the interest of science to investigate the truth in the matter, adding that it was his intention to spend at least one night in the dreaded haunted house. Some were horrified, while others pitied the adventurous stranger, and others, more charitable, advised him to

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desist from his project as he would certainly never come out alive. But to this the stranger simply smiled and said that he was willing and anxious to run the risk.

At sundown the whole parish was assembled under the tall trees in front of the dreaded haunted house. Women were devoutly saying prayers upon their beads, and men stood in little groups smoking their pipes and discussing the strange action of the man who was to sleep in the haunted house that night.

When Dr. Pichette drove up with the stranger a murmur of great pity and fear was heard, and when the Doctor shook hands smilingly with the pretended American scientist who was about to enter the house many of the women became hysterical and fairly cried out to stop him from entering. But the next instant the door was pushed open and Victor was in his old home, greatly affected by the strange and weird condition under which he

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again had stepped into the cherished home of his childhood.

As the darkness of the night came on and increased, greater grew the nervous tension of the people, who had decided to remain and watch through the night the old haunted house. To many the strain was too great, and before it was late they were obliged to go to their homes.

At about midnight an intense excitement was created among the watchers by the apparition of the white-robed form of a woman who seemed to be slowly gliding among the trees nearest to the back of the house. All the people fell on their knees, trembling with awe and dread, and they prayed loudly for themselves and also for the unfortunate stranger in the house. As the white-robed figure approached the entrance to the house some of the women screamed, "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" and fainted.

At that instant Marie-Louise, in her white costume, entered the haunted

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house where Victor had patiently waited for her. Sitting by the window, hands in hands, they talked over the days of their childhood, when often by starlight they had wandered together through the forest, stopping upon the shores of the beautiful St. Lawrence River, where, upon some rock, they had planned for the future, never dreaming that such fearful scenes as were now taking place would ever happen. As the clouds that had darkened the night began to be dispelled by the early sunrise, giving hope of a perfect day, they still sat by the window, but Marie-Louise, exhausted by the emotions of the night, had fallen asleep, her head resting on Victor's shoulder, who enjoyed the situation too deeply to sleep.

To those who had remained on watch all night many were added with sunrise, and with a feeling of expectancy of some strange and mysterious happening, the growing crowd slowly advanced near the house. Many expected to see a maniac come out of the house if the man were yet alive, but it was gen-

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erally believed that he must have died of fright during the night.

The bravest among them were approaching quite close to the house while the more timid and the women remained behind, partly hiding themselves back of the tall pines. When the feeling of excited expectation reached its climax the front door of the house was opened from the inside and upon its threshold stood the stranger smiling at them, and after the noise of their murmuring voices subsided, he said:

"Last night your ex-curé, Victor Dorion, was in this house, dreaming of his childhood days. He held in his hands the 'soutane' he used to wear when he was your officiating priest; and as he looked back to the days of his childhood he felt the tears coursing down his cheeks and was tempted to curse the fanaticism that made it possible for you to believe that your religion demands that you should be so superstitious and intolerant. Your uncharitable judgment has followed the victims of your fanaticism beyond

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death, and your ignorance made it possible for you to believe that ghosts of departed persons were wandering back into this world.

"You have called this place 'the haunted house.' Why? Can any one of you answer me? No, but I will answer for you. You believe in ghosts because from the first tottering steps of your childhood you are educated in that religious fanaticism which nurses such belief. It is not your religion that is to blame, but the way it is taught to you; and your ministers are responsible for the pitiful state in which you are living.

"My own father was a victim of the same religious enthusiasm, and no one has suffered more than I have from its dire and cruel results. I, the son of Aimé Dorion! I, Victor Dorion, the defroque—your ex-curé! Don't you recognize me? My visits after dark to this home of mine before I left were the cause of your belief that it was haunted, and last night when you saw a white-robed form approaching this place you

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felt sure that you were gazing upon some supernatural being, but in fact, the white-robed apparition of last night was simply another victim of your fanatic notions, as it was no one else than Marie-Louise Lenoir, the daughter of the late Dr. Lenoir; Marie-Louise, whom I your ex-priest will marry. Hers was the form that you saw at night praying upon the grave of her mother in the cemetery, where in the peaceful solitude of the graves she forgot your miserable injustice.

“Driven to the wall like a wild beast by your narrow and uncharitable judgment, I lingered here in this house as long as I could and then went away, strong in my belief that God was on my side; and to-day, if I linger here again it is for the sake of her whom you have ostracized, and also for the sake of the remembrance of the first years of my childhood, happy until I felt the infection of your wild and extravagant notions of religion.

“While you were discussing the ghosts of this place, making conjectures

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about the torments that my soul was enduring if I were dead, I was making a fortune, making a blessed fortune by the hope of coming after the other being who was so keenly afflicted by your barbarity; and to-day, rich in money, I am still richer in the happiness of taking away from your midst my beloved Marie-Louise, whose personality among you is like a superb diamond among crude stones.

“As I now stand before you there is more pity than bitterness in my soul, and with the hope that your eyes will be opened by this happening, I shall go away with forgiveness in my heart. And as a monument of my forgiveness I will give fifty thousand dollars for the purpose of building a home for the old and feeble, the same home to be erected right here under these tall pines that have witnessed the happiness of my childhood days. The money will be placed in trust in the hands of your curé, and the contemplated institution is to be under the direction of the ‘Sisters of Chartiy,’ and I will further

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provide for an annuity of five thousand dollars to pay the running expenses each year during twenty-five years."

As Victor ceased speaking the amazed crowd rushed to him, some acting like mad, crying and imploring his forgiveness.

They were under the spell of his eloquence. Under his burning words of truth the misty fanaticism of their nature began to be dispelled, and for the time being they were willing to let the truthfulness of his thoughts brighten their souls; but later, when they wandered slowly back to their homes, some felt the darkness of doubt creep back into their souls, and shaking their heads they said: "This man with all his money may be the devil in disguise, because no good man could have once been a priest and then decide to marry."

"That's so," others answered.

When the village priest was informed about the strange facts of the night before, and about Victor Dorion's words, he shook his head in a doubtful way and told his parishioners to pray for

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the poor man who had gone so far as to forget his obligations of priesthood.

When Victor, accompanied by Dr. Pichette, called on the village priest for the purpose of making a formal offer of his donation and make arrangements to build the proposed charitable institution, he was surprised to hear the priest say: "I cannot accept your money or agree to carry out your plans without first being authorized by my superior, his Grace the Bishop of the diocese."

Victor decided to go to the Bishop and inform him of the proposed donation. The Bishop was greatly pleased with Victor's magnificent offer, and, businessman-like, he accepted it at once, agreeing to supervise the details of construction himself. Victor was pleased at the cordiality with which the Bishop treated him, and encouraged by his Grace's kindness, Victor, notwithstanding the fact that he was aware of the rules of the Catholic Church relating to the marriage of priests, decided

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to mention his proposed marriage to the Bishop.

"The Catholic Church, as you certainly must know, would never sanction the marriage of one of her priests," answered the Bishop.

"I am no more a priest," said Victor.

"Once a priest, always a priest," stated the Bishop.

"Then I must understand that it will not be possible for me to be married in the Catholic Church?" asked Victor.

"Surely not, unless you obtain a special dispensation from the Pope," answered the Bishop, offering his services to open negotiations with his Holiness, the Pope, with a view of obtaining a dispensation.

But Victor was not willing to wait for the long delay necessitated by such negotiations, and informed the Bishop of his decision to get married out of the Catholic Church, and the next day Victor and Marie-Louise were united in Montreal under the civil law.

When Victor Dorion and his bride arrived at Victoria they were met at the

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little station by the whole town, and never was a welcome more sincerely and touchingly given to anyone than the one accorded the new couple by the population of Victoria. The streets were gaily decorated, and everywhere were signs of rejoicing, and a band, which had been engaged from San Francisco for the occasion, filled the air with joyous and lively melodies such as never before had been heard in those regions.

"You must be the king of this place," said Marie-Louise, surprised at the extraordinary reception and demonstration accorded to her husband.

"No, ma chérie, I am not their king, but this demonstration is for my queen. Were I alone there would be none of this. It is in your honor, and they are not doing too much."

Just then a reception committee surrounded them, and the chairman, a bluff miner little used to these things, did the best he could to properly read his short address of welcome, at the conclusion of which another miner

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awkwardly advanced to Marie-Louise, carrying a big bouquet of American Beauties and other flowers and presented them to her, who, with tears of joy in her eyes, accepted them and carried them to her lips while a great outburst of applause broke out.

"Oh, if I could only speak English," said Marie-Louise to Victor as they were driving to their new home, which was about half a mile from the station.

"Never mind, dear, I'll teach you in a very short while."

When they reached the magnificent villa Marie-Louise could hardly believe that it was not a dream. Used to the simple life of her little village, she now found herself the mistress of a beautiful mansion, richer than anything she had ever dreamed of, and in her soul she almost wished that her new home might have been less rich and grand, but it was Victor's wish, and his wish was her law.

Kissing her tenderly before sitting down to their first meal in their home, Victor said, "Marie-Louise, you are

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the queen of all this; it's yours; and all I ask in return is to let me be king of your heart always."

She did not answer him, but in her lingering embrace there was more eloquence than could have been in words.

Ten years later once more Victor and Marie-Louise were sitting under the stately pines where they had learned to love each other, and while enjoying the sacred memories of the past they were watching their oldest son, a manly little fellow who was playing in a small boat chained near a huge rock a few hundred feet from where they sat. The waves of the quiet St. Lawrence seemed playfully to push the frail boat against the rock for the child's amusement, and at each jump from the boat to the rock the boy's happy laugh rang in the cool and pure atmosphere to re-echo along the shores of the river. Suddenly, as if just having discovered something wonderful, the boy called out: "Oh, papa! papa! come here!"

"What's the matter, Louis?" answered the father.

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"Come here quick; there's some letters written on this big rock; come and see; they are just above the water."

"Can't you read them, my son?"

"I guess I can, but they look so old that they can hardly be made out."

"Well, what are they?"

"They look like an M and a V, but I am not sure. Come and see if I am right, papa."

Victor and Marie-Louise looked at each other for an instant, and as Victor rose to go to his son his wife pressed his hand tenderly as tears of love came to her eyes.

"Look right there, papa," said the little fellow, pointing to where the letters could plainly be seen.

"Oh, yes, I see, Louis; you are right, the letters are M. V."

"Who do you suppose took the trouble to write them in that hard stone, papa?"

For an instant the father failed to answer, but as a smile came over his face, he said: "I did, my son."

"Who made you do it, papa?"

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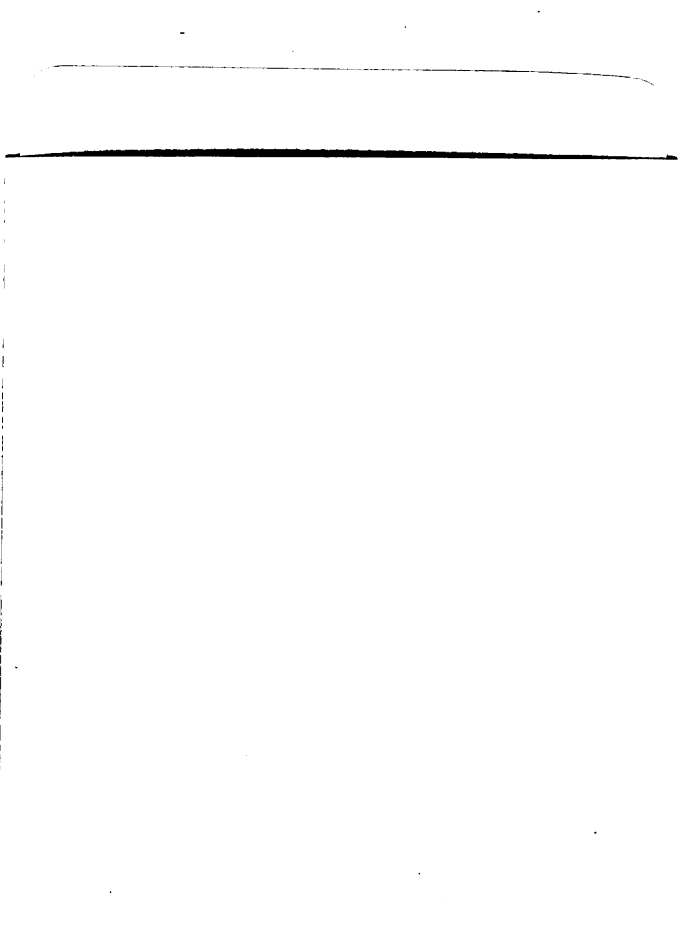
"Your mother," answered Victor, as he saw Marie-Louise coming near them.

"Do you remember, mamma, when you made papa carve those letters there?"

"Yes, my boy, I remember very well," answered Marie-Louise, and as she stood there with Victor, facing this memento of their young love, they felt that silver link, that silken tie,

"Which heart to heart and mind to mind,
In body and in soul can bind."

THE END



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